

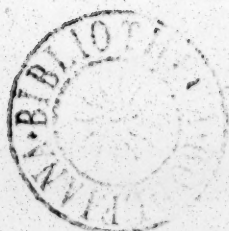
THE
WORKS
OF
THOMAS SECKER, LL.D.

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I HAVE hitherto explained and vindicated the daily service of our Church, as far as the creed; which is placed between the third part of it, the lessons; and the fourth, the petitions; that we may express that faith in what we have heard, which is the ground of what we are about to ask. For as *faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God**; so we must *ask in faith*, if we *think to receive anything of the Lord†*. For *how shall we call upon Him, in whom we have not believed‡*? But as all the doctrines of scripture, though equally true, are not of equal importance; the more necessary articles have been, from the beginning of Christianity, collected into one body, called in scripture, *the form of sound words§*, *the words of faith||*, *the principles of the doctrine of Christ¶*; but in our common way of speaking at present, the *creed*, from the *Latin* word, *credo*, which signifies, *I believe*. Now the ancient churches had many such creeds; some longer, some shorter; differing on several heads in phrase, but agreeing in method and sense; of which, that called the *apostles creed*, is one. And it deserves this name, not so much from any certainty, or great likelihood, that the apostles drew it up in these very expressions, (though some, pretty early,

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* Rom. x. 17.

† Rom. x. 14.

|| 1 Tim. iv. 6.

‡ James i. 6. 7.

§ 2 Tim. i. 13.

¶ Heb. vi. 1.

and many since, have imagined they did), as because it contains the chief apostolic doctrines; and was used by a Church, which, before it grew corrupt, was justly respected as the chief apostolic settlement; I mean, the *Roman*.

As with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, so with the mouth confession is made unto salvation*; of which confession, repeating our creed, though not a necessary, is a rational and commendable act. We do not indeed find it to have made part of the oldest public offices; but surely it is full as proper for these, as for private devotions, in which the primitive Christians all said it daily†. And as every one's profession of belief is his own separate act, so the creed is worded for every one separately in the singular number: and therefore unless we say it along with the minister, he alone testifies his faith; not we, ours. Nor should it by any means be with negligence and indifference, that we profess our faith. For what we believe is the only just foundation of what we do, or hope, or fear. On this account, we stand at the repeating of the creed, to express our steadfastness in it, and our readiness to *contend earnestly*, in every proper method, *for the faith once delivered to the saints*‡. Turning at the same time towards the east, as many do, is an ancient custom; as indeed, in most religions, men have directed their worship some particular way. And this practice being intended only to honour *Christ*, the sun of righteousness, who hath risen upon us, to enlighten us with that doctrine of salvation, to which we then declare our adherence; it ought not to be condemned as superstition; and yet, being neither obligatory in itself, nor commanded by authority, the omission of it ought not to be censured as irreverence or disobedience.

Another thing, yet more usual in saying the creed, is to bow, when the name of *Jesus* is mentioned. And some have thought that to be their duty, whenever it is mentioned, at least in divine service; because they find in their bibles the words

* Rom. x. 10.

† Symbolum quoque specialiter debemus—antelucanis Horis quotidie recenfere. Ambros. de Virg. l. 3. p. 115. ap. BINGH. l. 10. c. 4. § 17. Quis non quotidie recitat ore, Credo, &c. Lib. de duplici Martyrio, Cypriano falso ascript. in fine.

‡ Jude ver. 3.

words, *that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow* *. But this is no ancient notion; and the generality of judicious commentators allow it not to be the meaning of the place; a more exact translation of which would be, *that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow*, that is, every one should pray; according to that other passage of St. Paul, *I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that he would grant you, &c* †. However, it is a practice of some antiquity, and, whatever a few over-scrupulous people have imagined, surely a harmless one; for nobody means to worship the sound, but the person whom it denotes. And though we confess, there is no more reason to worship the Son of God, by bowing to him, than the Father, nor to worship him on hearing the name *Jesus*, than the name *Christ*; yet it is not good to be contentious about an innocent custom ‡, which also may help attention, and increase devotion. Besides, it is authorized by the 18th canon of our church, which directs, that *when, in time of divine service, the Lord Jesus shall be mentioned, due and lowly reverence shall be done by all persons present, as it hath been accustomed*. Possibly these last words may be designed to intimate, that fear of giving offence by leaving off the custom, was a principal motive to the injunction. And if so, in proportion as that danger abates, the injunction grows less important. Accordingly, they who are intrusted with the execution of the canons, have not lately, if ever, enforced it, or laid stress upon it. And indeed, as the greater part of most congregations disregard it, except in the creed, they ought not to judge hardly of those who omit it then also; however proper they may think it, for themselves, to distinguish that part of their belief, which peculiarly belongs to them as Christians, from the preceding, by this gesture.

Having explained the apostles creed at large, in several lectures on the catechism, I shall add nothing more concerning it here. But there will be need to take some notice of another, appointed to be rehearsed in its stead, on the principal festivals, and several other holidays, and called the creed of St. *Athanasius*; not that he was the author of it, though it was probably made pretty near, if not in his time, who lived 1400

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years

* Phil. ii. 10.

† Eph. iii. 14.

‡ 1 Cor. xi. 16.

years ago ; but because it expresses that faith in the Trinity, of which he was a principal defender. And as the *Romanists* threw on the reformers of our church all manner of calumnies that they could, so it would have given them a great handle against us, had this creed, which they repeat every Sunday, been rejected or altered by us.

Many indeed have argued against the use of it, and some with strange vehemence ; partly from the doctrines which it teaches ; but chiefly from the condemnation which it pronounces on all who disbelieve them. Now the doctrines are undeniably the same with those that are contained in the articles of our church, in the beginning of our litany, in the conclusions of many of our collects, in the *Nicene* creed, and, as we conceive, in that of the apostles, in the doxology, in the form of baptism, in numerous passages of both testaments ; only here they are somewhat more distinctly set forth, to prevent equivocations. Any one, who examines into the matter, will easily see it to be so. Accordingly our dissenting brethren, after they had long objected to other parts of our liturgy, consented readily to subscribe this creed ; the articles of which are the common faith of the Catholic Church, or by immediate consequence deducible from it, and little or nothing more. There are indeed several things in them, beyond our comprehension, as to the manner ; but the scripture hath the same. There are expressions, which may seem liable to exception ; but it must be for want of understanding them, or admitting fair interpretations of them. The assertion, that *there is one Father, not three Fathers*, and so on, may appear to the ignorant, needless and trifling ; but was levelled against heresies then in being, which took away all distinction between the three persons. That *none is before or after other*, means, (as the following words, *but the whole three persons are coeternal*, prove) that none is so in point of time, not that none is so in the order of our conceptions ; for the scripture directs us to consider the Father, as first. That *none is greater or less than another*, is reconciled to our Saviour's assertion, *The Father is greater than I**, by what follows in the creed, *equal as touching his Godhead, inferior as touching his*

* John xiv. 28.

his manhood. That he is *one, altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person,* means, (for so the next words explain it,) that as each of us is one man, not at all by blending the soul and body into one substance, for they are still distinct, but *altogether*, by a mysterious union of the two: so he is one Christ, not at all by blending the divine and human nature into one substance, but altogether, entirely and solely, by an union of them, yet more mysterious than the former is.

The condemnation, contained in two or three clauses of this creed, belongs, (as the most zealous defenders of our faith in the holy Trinity agree, and as every one who reads it considerately, will soon perceive), not to all, who cannot understand, or cannot approve, every expression in it; but only to such, as deny in general *the Trinity in Unity*, or three persons, who are one God. *This* alone is said to be *the Catholic faith*. The words, that follow after, *For there is one person of the Father*, and so on, are designed only to set this forth more particularly. And the conclusion from the whole is, not that *in all things*, which are *asforesaid*, by the use of every term above mentioned, but *in all things*, AS IS *asforesaid*, *the Unity in Trinity is to be worshipped*; meaning, that as at first it was said, that in all acts of faith we are to believe in each person, so here it is added, that in all acts of worship we are to adore each; never considering one, even while addressed distinctly, as separated or separable from the other two. Now this Trinity in Unity we apprehend to have been, ever since it was fully revealed, a fundamental article of the Christian faith. And yet those, who believe not even so much, the creed no otherwise teaches *cannot be saved*, or *shall without doubt perish*, than as our Saviour teaches concerning the whole of the gospel: *He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned* *. Our condemnation is no more hard and uncharitable, than his. And neither is so; because both are to be interpreted with due exceptions and abatements. Suppose a collection of Christian duties had been drawn up; and it had been said, in the beginning or at the end of it, *This is the Catholic practice, which except a man observe faithfully, he cannot be saved*; would

* Mark xvi. 16.

would not every one understand, that allowance must be made for such things as a man through involuntary ignorance mistook, or through mere infirmity failed in, or was truly sorry for, as far as he knew he had cause? Why then are not the same allowances to be understood, in speaking of doctrines? For when the creed says, that *Whoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic faith*; it doth not mean, that true faith is more *necessary*, than right practice; but that naturally it precedes it, and is to be first learnt in order to it. The intention therefore of the creed, as well as of our Lord in the gospel, is only to say, that whoever rejects the doctrine of it, from presumptuous self-opinion, or wilful negligence, and doth not afterwards repent of these faults, particularly if he is made sensible of them, or if not, at least in general, amongst his unknown sins, the case of such a one is desperate. But if want of information, weakness of apprehension, or even excusable wrongness of disposition, should make him doubt or disbelieve any or the main part of this creed; nay, which is vastly a worse case, the whole revelation of Christianity; though we pass judgment on his errors without reserve, and, in general, on all who maintain them; yet personally and singly we presume not to judge of his condition in the next world. *To his own master he standeth or falleth* *. Much less would we think unfavourably of any one, who takes these condemning clauses in too rigorous a sense, and therefore only is afraid, from a spirit of charity and humility, to join in them. Indeed, for the sake of such, it may seem pity, but either they had been originally omitted; (since though defensible, they are not necessary to be inserted in a profession of faith;) or the limitations, with which they are to be understood, had been signified in two or three comprehensive words.

After our creed, we go on to our petitions. In these, the minister and people first recommend each other to our blessed Redeemer, in terms of scripture, which a council, held near 1200 years ago†, affirms to be used for this purpose by the direction of the apostles, and may certainly well be used

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* Rom. xiv. 4.

† Conc. Bracarense I A. D. 563. Can. xvi.

so without it: *The Lord be with you**: *And with thy Spirit*†: Then we make a direct application to him, under the names of *Lord* and *Christ*, repeating it thrice, as a mark of our earnestness, that he would *have mercy upon us*: Words often addressed to him, when on earth: often solemnly reiterated by the whole ancient Church, and spoken by the *Latin* Church in the original *Greek* of the New Testament, *Κυριε ελεησον* ‡, but much more prudently translated by ours into *English*.

This done, as before we subjoined the Lord's prayer to our confession, to obtain the confirmation of our pardon; so now we prefix it to our requests, as a summary of our desires. And surely saying it again at such a distance, and with so different a view, cannot be thought a *vain repetition* §.

After these general prayers, we express to God distinctly, in short sentences, the several heads of the supplications, which we are about to offer up more at large, for peace, and grace, for the king, the clergy, and the people. And all these sentences are conceived in words taken from the psalms; excepting one, *Give peace in our time, O Lord*; which hath a reason added to it, by some thought improper: *Because there is none other that fighteth for us, but only thou, O God*; whereas, say they, we often have others to fight for us; and if we had Him alone, why should we despond, and immediately pray for peace upon it? But these objectors utterly mistake our meaning; which is, that whatever help we have besides, we look upon it as nothing, without that of the Almighty; whom therefore we beg, in the words which they unjustly blame, when we are in peace, to continue it, by restraining such as would disturb it; and when we are not, to restore it, by turning the hearts, or overthrowing the attempts, of those who have infringed it.

In consequence of these preparations, the petitions themselves follow; not in one long prayer, but several short ones; which method is certainly as lawful as the other; and, we think, more expedient. It reminds us oftener of the Attributes of God, and merits of Christ, which are the ground of our *asking in faith* ||; and by the frequency of saying, *Amen*,
it

* 2 Thess. iii. 16.

† 2 Tim. iv. 22.

‡ Matth. xv. 22. xx. 30, 31.

§ Matth. vi. 7.

|| James i. 6.

it stirs up our attention, and warms our devotion, which are too apt to languish. These short prayers have the name of collects; either from their collecting much good matter, particularly out of scripture, into a small compass; or from their being originally composed for the people to use, when collected and assembled together. And the first of these collects is, That for the day. Besides the Lord's day, which is the weekly memorial of all God's goodness to us, and our duty to Him, we have annual ones, to celebrate, not only the principal parts of the history of Christ, but also the holy lives and deaths of his chief followers, who are mentioned in the New Testament. For, as *the righteous are to be had in everlasting remembrance* *, and the epistle to the *Hebrews* particularly directed the first Christians to *remember them, which had had the rule over them, who had spoken unto them the word of God* †; as they did accordingly pay distinguished honours to the memories of the apostles, evangelists and martyrs; and as the church of *Rome*, which had gone much too far in this matter, would notwithstanding have had a great advantage against us, if we had neglected it entirely; we do therefore, on the days which bear their names, read portions of holy writ relating to them, return thanks to God for their labours and example; and beg, that we may profit suitably by them. This, then, makes a considerable proportion of the variable collects. The rest are appointed, one for each *Sunday* and week in the year: And the intention, however imperfectly executed, must have been, that sometimes praying more explicitly for this grace or mercy, sometimes for that, we may be likelier to obtain, through God's goodness, all that are needful for us.

The objection, that our service is taken from the *Papish*, affects chiefly the collects. But those of ours, which are the same with theirs, are mostly derived from prayer-books, brought over in the days of that Pope, by whose means our *Saxon* ancestors were converted to Christianity, above 1100 years ago; and they were old ones then; much older, than the main errors of popery. However, partly at, and partly since, the reformation, such of the collects in those books

* Ps. cxii. 6.

† Heb. xiii. 7.

books, as wanted and deserved it, have been carefully corrected; many that were thought improper, quite removed; and new ones framed in their stead. But why should those be changed, which are both faultless in themselves, and recommended by venerable antiquity?

After the collect for the day, come two constant ones, to be used every day, *for peace and grace*; general words, comprehending between them all blessings, temporal and spiritual. In the former, which is translated from the ancient *Latin* offices, we beseech God, *in the knowledge of whom standeth our hope of eternal life* hereafter, and *whose service*, in proportion as we improve in it, gives us here *perfect freedom* from the tyranny of sin, and the stings of an evil conscience, would likewise *so defend us in all assaults of our outward enemies, that trusting in Him, we may not fear them*. Thus we embolden ourselves, from the consideration of his greater mercies, to hope for the lesser: In imitation of the apostle's reasoning, *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things**? The latter of these collects is not taken from the *Roman*, but principally from the *Greek* service, as others of our prayers besides are: the compilers of our liturgy prudently extracting from both, what was proper to enrich and add authority to the work, in which they were engaged. And it begs that protection of God more especially for the present day, which the former begs in general: but above all, *that we may fall into no sin* even undesignedly, much less *run into any kind of danger* of it wilfully, but *do always what is righteous in his sight*.

After these collects, follows, on *Sundays, Wednesdays, and Fridays*, the litany. But I shall speak of that hereafter, God willing; and proceed now with the stated service of the other days of the week: in which, having put up the before-mentioned prayers for ourselves, we begin our intercessions for other persons; and first for *the king, as supreme*†: in obedience to the apostle's injunctions‡, and in imitation of the primitive Christians, even while they lived under Heathen emperors. The duties of that station being very important and

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B

difficult,

* Rom. viii. 32.

† 1 Pet. ii. 13.

‡ 1 Tim. ii. 1.

difficult, and the hazards of erring and sinning in it many and great, we therefore pray Him, who is *the only ruler* of the heart and conduct of *princes*, and *beholds* the state of *all the dwellers* in their dominions every where *on earth*, to *replenish* our *Sovereign*, both with *the graces and the gifts*, needful for him: to *grant him long to live in health and wealth*; that is, prosperity; as we pray God, in the litany, to *deliver us in all time of our tribulation, in all time of our wealth*; to *strengthen him, that he may overcome all his enemies*, all that wish ill to him or his people; and, finally, to bestow on him *everlasting felicity*.

Then, because the Royal Family are the future hopes of the public, and in the mean while their whole behaviour is of very great consequence to it; we apply more distinctly than the ancient church did, but surely with reason, to *the fountain of all goodness*, who therefore is able to supply the branches, as well as the root, for such blessings on every branch, especially the principal by name, as their condition requires.

After this, we pray for the whole clergy and people of our land: that he, *who alone worketh great marvels*; who hath in all ages marvellously protected his church against the devil and wicked men; who endued his apostles with marvellous and miraculous gifts on the day of *Pentecost*, and by their means many others; who doth and ever will produce marvellous effects on the hearts of believers by the ministry of his word and sacraments, and who only can do such things; would *send down the healthful*, that is, the healing, strengthening, and saving *Spirit of his grace, on all bishops and curates*; persons to whom the cure or care of souls is intrusted; for this the word *Curate*, signifies throughout the prayer-book, not merely those ministers who assist the proper incumbent; and likewise on *all congregations committed to their charge*. And we further beseech him, not only to bestow on them at first good dispositions; but (*that they may truly and lastingly please him*) *pour upon them his continual blessing*, like a kindly dew descending above. *For neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase* *.

Next

* 1 Cor. iii. 7.

Next to this, *in the time of war*, we address ourselves to the *Almighty Governor of all things*, whose *justice in punishing us sinners* with this evil we acknowledge, and whose *mercy* to deliver us from it, on our *true repentance*, we hope for, and cannot hope for it else: complaining of the *pride and malice of our enemies*; of which they must be guilty, if the war on our side be lawful, otherwise there would be peace: and in the genuine spirit of Christianity intreating, that the one may be *abated*, the other *assuaged*; which is praying for them, as well as ourselves. And till they suffer their dispositions to be mended, we beg that their *devices* and enterprises may be *confounded*: which word, as dreadful as it sounds too often in passionate common speech, means here no more than disappointed: and this is the worst we wish, even to those *who hate us and despitefully use us* *.

There is also appointed a very fit *prayer to be read during the Session of Parliament*, for a blessing on their consultations. But here it may be asked, how the compilers of it could venture to call in it every one of our kings, in all time to come, *most religious*. Now certainly they did not intend to prophesy, that, in the common meaning of the word, they always would be so: nor yet to require, that we should call them so in a sense, that was not true. And therefore they must either mean by *religious*, (what it sometimes means in the language from which it is derived,) the object of most awful regard, sacred, a title frequently ascribed to kings: or indeed rather, *most religious* must be understood in the same manner, as the next word to it, *gracious*, constantly is, without the least difficulty or scruple, both in the liturgy and out of it; and as the titles, *most Christian*, and *most Catholic*, are to denote the good qualities which princes profess, and should have; and therefore their subjects are willing and ought to hope they have; and by reminding them, endeavour that they may have. Accordingly this very epithet, *most religious*, was constantly ascribed to all successive emperors in St. *Chrysostom's* and St. *Basil's* liturgies, the common ones of the *Greek church*, as it is to all successive kings in ours. The intention being thus cleared, the lawfulness of joining in the expression is evident.

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* Matt. v. 44.

In the prudence of choosing it originally, we are less concerned. Yet in defence of that we may plead, that this prayer was composed, and originally used in the reign of a prince, acknowledged to be unfeignedly religious, king *Charles the First* *. And whatever scruples have been raised concerning the propriety of this part of it in some reigns, since happily there is no room for them in the present.

After these particular intercessions, we add a general one for all mankind, especially for all Christians, and most especially for all that are in affliction: to which we subjoin as general a thanksgiving for all God's mercies to us and them; but above all, for that which gives us a claim to eternal happiness. Neither of these forms is taken from any other liturgy: both are excellent: and every one who desires it, may, by signifying that desire, have a separate share in either. This provision is a very useful and comfortable one: and we exhort you, on all fit occasions, to take the advantage of it. Only we must beg, that they who have received benefit by being prayed for, will not forget to return thanks; but conscientiously avoid our Saviour's reproof: *Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine* †?

The general thanksgiving may perhaps to some appear superfluous, after we have thanked and praised God in the use of the psalms and hymns. But it was inserted at the restoration, because others complained it was wanting. And indeed it is a more methodical summary of the several mercies of God *to us and to all men*, than we had before: it furnishes an opportunity of thanking him more expressly for the late instances of his *loving kindness* to the members of our own congregation: and besides, as we cannot be too thankful to God, the acknowledgments, which we offered up in the beginning of the service, are very properly repeated in the end. For surely we ought to ask nothing of God, without remembering what we have received from him: which naturally excites both our faith and resignation; and prepares the way for that admirable collect, with which we conclude.

It is taken from the middle of St. *Chrysostom's* liturgy; but much more judiciously placed in the close of ours. It
first

* See Wilkins Conc. vol. 4. p. 539.

† Luke xvii. 17.

first thankfully confesses the great goodness of our blessed Redeemer, in disposing our minds, of themselves so variously and wrongly inclined, to ask unanimously of Him such things as we ought, and encouraging our applications by such explicit assurances of hearing us. Then it submits entirely to his wisdom, in what manner, and how far, he will think it for our good to grant us any of our particular requests ; begging nothing absolutely, but what he hath absolutely engaged to bestow on our prayers and endeavours, *viz.* that practical knowledge here of his truth, his doctrines and precepts, his promises and threatenings, that hereafter we may attain *everlasting life* and happiness.

These things done, it can only remain, that on departing from God's more immediate presence in his church, we intreat for ourselves and one another (as we do accordingly in the words of scripture *), the continual presence of the Holy Trinity, wherever we go : that *grace of our Lord Jesus Christ*, which will secure us *the love of God* the Father, and *the fellowship*, that is, the communication of the needful warnings and assistances of the Holy Ghost.

Now *what we thus faithfully ask, may we effectually obtain, to the relief of our necessity, and the setting forth of God's glory, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

* 2 Cor. xiii. 14.

S E R M O N X C V I .

AN EXPLANATION AND DEFENCE OF THE LITURGY OF THE
CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

I COR. xiv. 15.

—*I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the Understanding also: I will sing with the Spirit, and I will sing with the Understanding also.*

THE liturgy of our church has now been explained to you, as far as the end of the morning prayer. The evening prayer hath nothing different from it; excepting the hymns, that follow the lessons, and the two collects after that for the day.

The hymn after the first lesson, called *Magnificat*, from the word with which it begins in the *Latin*, was used anciently by the western church; and continues to be used by the Protestants abroad. It is the song of the blessed virgin, recorded by St. *Luke**, on the confirmation which she received, at *Elizabeth's* house, of what the angel had told her, that she should become the mother of our Lord, by the operation of the Holy Ghost: and it expresses most naturally the transport, which on that occasion she must feel; but, like the hymn of *Zacharias*, in phrases of the Old Testament, to be interpreted from the New; of which matter I have already spoken.

My soul doth magnify the Lord; doth acknowledge the infinite greatness of his power and mercy: *for he hath regarded the lowliness of his hand-maiden*; that is, the *low estate*; for so the original signifies, and so it is expressed in our bibles; not the humility of mind, which the holy virgin was too humble

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* *Luke* i. 46—55.

to ascribe to herself. *From henceforth all generations shall call me blessed*: as we do accordingly, both by repeating this hymn, and in our common speech. *For he, that is mighty, hath magnified me*, hath raised me to great honour: *and holy is his name*; his truth, his justice, his mercy, his concern for the goodness as well as happiness of his creatures, are gloriously manifested in this wonderful dispensation. *He hath shewed* in times past, and will as certainly now, as if it were done already, *strength with his arm*, supernatural deeds performed by his power, for the erection of the kingdom of his Son: and hath often, and will again, *scatter and defeat the proud opposers of it*, by means of those very *imaginings of their hearts*, in which they exult. *The mighty amongst the Jews and Heathen shall be put down from their seat, and humble and meek Christians exalted in their stead. They, that hunger and thirst after righteousness**, shall be *filled with spiritual good things*; and *the rich*, that rely on the vain and false treasures of their own wisdom and merit, he will convict of being *poor, and blind, and naked†*, and so *send them empty away. He hath holpen his servant Israel*, all that by obeying him become his people, *as he promised to our forefathers, Abraham the father of the faithful, and his true seed*; thus remembering his covenant mercy, which shall last for ever. This is the triumph of the holy virgin: and every part of it should be our own likewise. For God *hath regarded our low estate*, together with her's, and *magnified us*, and made us *blessed*. And we should magnify and bless him continually for it.

Instead of this hymn, our prayer-book tells us, may be used, and in some places it frequently is, the 98th psalm: in which we exhort one another to *sing unto the Lord a new song*; words denoting, in the book of *Revelation‡*, gospel praises: and we foretell that *all lands* shall join in it, *with trumpets and shawms*, another instrument of wind-music, which in our bible is called a cornet: whence we may conclude, if it needed proof, that musical instruments are lawful in Christian worship. This future time of universal thanksgiving is described to be, when God shall *remember*, that is, shall give evidence that he hath never forgot *his mercy and truth to-*
wards

* Matt. v. 6.

† Rev. iii. 17.

‡ Rev. v. 9. xiv. 3.

wards the house of Israel, according to the flesh ; and not only they, but all the ends of the world shall see his salvation. No wonder, that even the irrational and inanimate parts of nature are called upon, by a lofty figure of speech, to celebrate that glorious day : the sea to make a noise, and all that therein is ; the floods to clap their hands, and the hills to be joyful together before the Lord : partly for the present happiness of that period, in which possibly the lowest of God's works may share ; but chiefly for the approach of the next and concluding scene of Providence, when he shall come finally, with righteousness to judge the world, and the people with equity.

After the second lesson, is appointed another hymn, used by the ancient church, in their private devotions at least ; and by the present Greek and foreign reformed, as well as ours and the Romish, in their public ones ; and called from the Latin beginning of it, *Nunc dimittis*. It expresses the gratitude of good old Simeon, a just man and devout, as we read in St. Luke *, and waiting for the consolation of Israel ; to whom it was revealed, that he should not die, till he had seen the Lord's Christ. Accordingly, he came by the Spirit into the temple : and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, he took him up in his arms, (image to yourselves the scene, I beg you) and blessed God, and said : Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, that is, in comfort, according to thy word ; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared to set before the face of all people. And the following sentence hath a strong appearance of being designed by the Holy Ghost to intimate, (whether the speaker of it perceived the design or not) that, contrary to the expected and natural order of things, Christ should first be a light to lighten the Gentiles ; then afterwards, the glory of God's people Israel. To perceive the fitness of Simeon's thanksgiving for our use, it needs only be remembered, and ever should in repeating it, that we also have seen the Lord's salvation. For though we have not yet beheld our Saviour with our bodily eyes ; to that of faith he is exhibited continually in the gospel-history and sacraments ; we may meet him in his church, we may converse with him in our private meditations. And this we should think hap-

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* Luke ii. 25—32.

pineness enough for us here, whatever else we want or suffer; and be always prepared, and always willing, to *blefs God*, and *depart in peace*.

For this hymn we are allowed to use, and sometimes do, the 67th psalm: which is a prophetic prayer, that, through *the light of God's countenance*, his gracious illumination, *the way of his providence* and man's duty to him *may be known on earth*, his *saving health*, the means by which he heals and saves mens souls, *to all nations*: who are invited to *rejoice and be glad*, because *he shall judge the folk righteously*; shall govern and reward the people of the world, (for so the word *folk* signifies, and was not a low expression formerly), by the equitable and merciful rules of Christianity. For *then*, on our doing this, *the earth shall bring forth her increase* more plentifully; and *God, even our own God, shall give us his blessing*, temporal and spiritual: *for godliness hath promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come* *.

The former of the two collects, peculiar to evening prayers, is taken from a *Latin* form, at least 1100 years old. It begs for the greatest of blessings here below, that joyful peace of mind, which our Saviour promised his disciples: *Peace I leave with you: my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you* †. And since it cannot be obtained, but by *holy desires*, good and prudent *counsels* for the execution of them, and *just actions*, done in consequence of both; so we petition Him, *from whom all these proceed*, to grant it us by means of them; that *our hearts being set* by his grace *to keep his commandments*, and our ways *defended* by his providence *from the fear of our enemies*, we may find *the work of righteousness, peace*; and its effect, *quietness and assurance* for ever ‡.

The latter collect, taken in part from an office of the *Greeke* church, prays more particularly for the safety of the ensuing night: that God's favour may shine upon us, and *lighten our darkness*; that is, protects us, while we are unable to help ourselves, or even to know our danger. The same phrase is twice used in the book of Psalms. *Unto the godly there ariseth up light in darkness* §. And again, *The Lord shall make my darkness to be light* ||.

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C

Next

* 1 Tim. iv. 8.

† John xiv. 27.

‡ Is. xxxii. 17.

§ Ps. cxii. 4.

|| Ps. xviii. 28.

Next to the morning and evening service in our prayer-book stands *the litany*, or more earnest supplication for averting God's judgments, and procuring his mercy. This earnestness, it was thought, would be best excited and expressed by the people's interposing frequently, to repeat with their own mouths, the solemn form of *beseeking* God to *deliver* and to *bear* them: in which, however, the minister is understood to join equally; as the congregation are in every particular specified by him. Such litanies have been used in the church at least 1400 years. And they were appointed first for *Wednesdays* and *Fridays*, these being appropriated to penitence and humiliation, and for other fasts: but not long after for *Sundays* also; there being then the largest congregation, and most solemn worship; and our litany is further directed to be used at such other times, as the ordinary shall think proper. Originally it was intended for a distinct service; to come after the morning prayer, as the rubric of our liturgy still directs, and before the office for the communion, at a proper distance of time from each; of which custom a few churches preserve still, or did lately, some remains. But in the rest, convenience or inclination hath prevailed to join them all three together: excepting that in some places there is a psalm or anthem between the first and second; and between the second and third almost every where: besides that the latter part of the morning prayer is, most of it, ordered to be omitted, when the litany is said with it. But still, by this close conjunction, several things may appear improper repetitions; which, if the offices were separate, would not. However, as it is, they who use extempore prayers in public, have small right to reproach us on this head. For doth it not frequently happen, that, during one assembly of theirs, different ministers praying successively, or the same minister in several prayers, or perhaps in one only, shall fall into as many repetitions, as are in the different parts of our liturgy, or more? But be that as it will, to these last all persons would easily be reconciled, if an interval were placed, in their minds at least, between the services; and they would consider each, when it begins, as a new and independent one, just as if it were a fresh time of meeting together.

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The litany of our church is not quite the same with any other : but differs very little from those of the Lutherans in *Germany* and *Denmark*. It is larger than the *Greek*, but shorter than the *Roman*, which is half filled up with the names of saints invoked : whereas we invoke, first the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, separately and jointly ; then in a more particular manner our Redeemer and Mediator, *to whom all power is given in heaven and earth* *.

Him we pray, that he would *not remember our offences, nor the offences of our forefathers* : which he may not only with justice permit to intercept from us (as they naturally often will) the blessings that we might else have inherited ; but, if we have imitated wicked ancestors, instead of taking warning by them, he may with equal justice punish us more severely, not indeed than we deserve, but than he would have done otherwise, to prevent the contagion from growing general and inveterate. Accordingly the second commandment threatens to *visit the iniquities of the fathers upon the children* : and the Psalmist, according to the marginal, and perhaps righter translation, prays as we do : *O remember not against us the iniquities of them that were before us* †.

The words, *and be not angry with us for ever*, beg, that the corrections which he doth see fit to inflict on us (for surely we all feel some), he would in mercy shorten. It is common language to speak of afflictions, that last any time, as if they were endless. And the expostulation of *David* in the just quoted psalm, *How long, O Lord, wilt thou be angry for ever* ‡? fully vindicates this petition, which was doubtless taken from thence.

Having, after this, besought our blessed Lord to deliver us *from all evil and mischief* in general, that is, from every thing bad and hurtful to us : we deservedly rank *sin* the foremost of such things ; and pray, first against the original cause of human wickedness, *the secret crafts and open assaults of the devil*, and its dreadful consequences, *God's wrath and everlasting damnation* ; then against the principal transgressions of his laws by name, subjoining, *and all other deadly sin*. By this we mean not to deny, that *the just wages of every sin is death* :

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death :

* Matt. xxviii 18.

† Ps. lxxix. 8.

‡ Ver. 5.

death * : (though *there are*, as we learn from St. *John* †, *sins not unto death*, that is comparatively) but only to pray against the peculiarly deadly with peculiar earnestness. But still, that we may leave out none, we petition lastly to be delivered *from all the deceits of the world, the flesh and the devil*: every iniquity of every kind and degree.

Then we proceed to deprecate the present sufferings that our sins have merited: and intreat our merciful Redeemer to preserve us both from such, as God's immediate hand inflicts; *lightening and tempest, plague* properly so called, *pestilence*, or epidemic diseases of any sort, *famine and sudden death*; and from such also as mens unreasonable passions produce; whether they be temporal, as *battle and murder*; or spiritual, as *false doctrine*, with its fruits, *heresy and schism*; and what begets them all, *hardness of heart* in regard to God's commands, and *contempt of his word*, which contempt was never so widely spread and infectious, as at present.

We have indeed been blamed for praying against *sudden death*. But the whole Christian church hath done it from ancient time: and nature and reason, as well as religion, directs us to do it. Some, we own (and we wish they were many), may be always prepared thoroughly, in all respects, to die at any time. Yet even these may have cause to wish for warning of their death, on account of other persons. Their example under the approach of it will usually be very instructive; and their dying advice more than ordinarily beneficial to their friends, dependents, and relations: whom also their being taken away at once may shock, to a degree, for which they would be extremely sorry, whatever they might otherwise choose for themselves. But, even on their own account, Christian humility would surely desire a little space for completer preparation. And they who profess to wish the contrary, are they so very certain, as this implies, that every part, both of their worldly affairs and their eternal concerns, is in the best condition to which it can be brought? Or may not possibly this appearing readiness to die at any time arise, either from a secret dread to think of dying at all, or a secret unbelief, more or less, of what will follow after death?

* Rom. vi. 23.

† 1 John v. 16, 17.

death? But whatever a few may imagine best for themselves, justly or unjustly; some previous notice is undeniably best for the generality: and common prayers must be adapted to common cases; always submitting it to God, to make exceptions, where he shall think proper.

Having thus expressed from what things we desire to be delivered, we earnestly intreat our good and gracious Lord to shew this mercy to us, *by the mystery of his holy incarnation*, and so on: that is, by the means, and for the sake, of all that he hath done and suffered for us. The same manner of expression is used, not only in common speech on other occasions, and in the liturgies of the ancient church on this, but in the scripture itself, where St. Paul beseeches Christians *by the mercies of God**, *by the meekness and gentleness of Christ*†, *by his coming and their gathering together to him*‡; and Daniel intercedes with God thus, *According to all thy righteousness, let thine anger be turned away: defer not for thine own sake, O my God*§.

As we have need of protection and deliverance continually, so we proceed to beg for it, not only *in all time of our tribulation*, or adversity; but *in all time of our wealth*, or prosperity: for when we seem in the most flourishing state, we are often in the most danger of evil; and of sin, the worst evil. But as *the hour of death* is a season of peculiar trial and terror; and *the day of judgment* will determine our lot for ever; we therefore intreat his more especial grace and favour at both. The former indeed fixes our condition at the latter. But still, as the best life and death obtain acquittal and reward, only through the pardoning goodness of our Judge; we have great cause to pray for ourselves, as St. Paul did for Onesiphorus, *that we may find mercy of the Lord in that day*||.

Having thus represented our own necessities, we now enlarge the subject of our devotions; and *make supplications*, as the apostle exhorts, *for all men*¶: acknowledging that we are *sinners*, and therefore unworthy; yet sensible that we are bound by his commands, and encouraged by his promises, to offer up such requests. And here, after praying in general

for

* Rom. xii. 1.

† 2 Cor. x. 1.

‡ 2 Thess. ii. 1.

§ Dan. ix. 16, 19.

|| 2 Tim. i. 18.

¶ 1 Tim. ii. 1.

for the Catholic church, we pray in particular for the head and principal members, both spiritual and temporal, of that part of it to which we belong, and for the whole of God's people of this land: then we extend our views further yet; and apply for blessings, religious and civil, to all other nations in common with our own; and to all sorts of persons amongst them and ourselves, according to their respective distresses and wants, of soul, body, or outward circumstances: and, lastly, conclude our intercessions with imploring God's *mercy upon all men*, whatever their country, their religion, their sins may be; but especially on *our enemies, persecutors, and slanderers*, whom we beg he would *forgive*, and in order to it, *turn their hearts* to a righter disposition.

Against some of our requests for others, objections have been made. One is, that in beseeching God *to succour, help, and comfort all that are in danger*, we beseech him to assist malefactors in escaping justice. But doth not every one understand it of such *help and comfort*, as their case admits, consistently with common good? Another is, that in praying him *to preserve all that travel by land or by water*, we pray for the preservation of robbers and pirates. But surely our intention is very plain: to beg that travellers, on their lawful occasions, may be secured from robbers and pirates, amongst other accidents: and if we add in our minds a further request, that these wretches also may be preserved, that is, from attempting any more injustice and violence, do we not act a very Christian part? The same cavil hath been raised against our praying for God's *pity to all prisoners*, and *mercy upon all men*: words, which notoriously mean such pity and mercy, as he shall judge not to be unfit. And writers and speakers never scruple to omit limitations, which every reader or hearer, who is not perverse, will of course supply.

After going through these petitions, we endeavour to excite our desires of a gracious answer, to as much fervency as we can, by short, but affectionate sentences, uttered alternately, in a sort of pious emulation, between the minister and people; and humbly importuning our Redeemer, as the eternal *Son* and spotless *Lamb of God*, the *Lord's Christ*, and the *Lord of Christians*, that he would *grant us* his promised *peace*, which includes all blessings, and *have mercy upon us*, in bestowing
what

what we have asked. For this purpose, it is acknowledged, we repeat several times the same words, with very small variations. But such *repetitions*, far from *vain**, are most expressive ones: the natural, the almost constant language of earnestness. Hence our Saviour, in his agony, reiterated the same words thrice†: and *David*, in a transport of thanksgiving, even to the six-and-twentieth time, as you may see in the 136th psalm. And these very repetitions, which we use, are warranted by the ancient offices of the Christian church.

Having thus enlivened our devotion, we proceed to offer up, what deserves the most lively efforts of it, that perfect summary of all our petitions, the *Lord's Prayer*: which, though it occur several times in the several services of the morning, occurs but once in this; and cannot easily be recited too often, provided it be with attention and affection.

Hitherto the litany hath dwelt on no single subject of prayer long; but comprehended a surprising variety of the most needful articles in a very narrow compass. The remainder is of a different nature. It considers our state here, very justly, as furnishing perpetual ground of sad reflection to every thoughtful mind: and applies itself wholly to express to our heavenly Father the sentiments required in such a condition. The seemingly happiest persons in the world are very inconsiderate, if they do not discern a great deal to mourn over, in others and themselves. Yet at the same time, the most afflicted are to blame, if they sink under either what they see or feel. But the common duty of both is, *in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, to make their requests known unto God*‡. And therefore this part of the litany, though first introduced on occasion of extraordinary distresses, lying heavy on *Christendom* 1100 or 1200 years ago, will be too seasonable in every age, till one of truer piety and more tranquillity shall come, than hath yet been known, or is likely soon to take place.

As the transgressions, by which we offend God, are the cause of our sufferings, these our supplications begin very properly, with intreating, in scripture words, that on humbling ourselves before him, he would *not deal with us after*

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* Matt. vi. 7.

† Matt. xxvi. 44.

‡ Phil. iv. 6.

our sins, neither reward us after our iniquities *. Next to this follows, as is repeated in the sequel, an exhortation, *Let us pray*: which may appear somewhat strange, considering that prayers immediately precede in both places. But they are short ejaculations, not continued forms, like those which follow. And besides, this redoubled admonition, towards the conclusion of the office, will very usefully remind those, who may possibly be growing languid and inattentive, in how important a work they are engaged. Something there was of this kind, even in the Heathen devotions. But in the old liturgies of Christian Greece, *Let us pray, Let us pray earnestly, Let us pray more earnestly*, often returns.

And the succeeding prayer, which is of ancient use in the western church, deserves our utmost earnestness. It begs of Him, who, as the Psalmist assures us, *will not despise a broken and a contrite heart* (which phrase I have already explained to you), that *in all our troubles* he will both *assist us to make our prayers before him* as we ought, and *graciously bear us*: that so the designs of our enemies, visible and invisible, may be disappointed, and we may feel and express a just gratitude for our deliverance. To this the congregation answer, not as usual, *Amen*: but in a short form of scripture words †, more strongly expressive of pious fervency. The minister instantly returns another scriptural address ‡ to God; pleading with him, and suggesting to us *the noble works done by him for his church and people in general, and many good persons in particular, which, if we have not seen with our eyes, we have heard with our ears*: holy writ and other history hath related them; or *our fathers have declared them to us, partly as performed in their days, partly in the old time before them*. And since *his arm is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor his ear become heavy, that it cannot hear* §; the congregation again petition him, in the same words as before; (only changing one for another, still more pathetic,) that he would *arise, help, and deliver them, for the honour of his name*: not for our merits, but his own glorious perfections, and the instruction of his creatures; that we and all men may learn

* Ps. ciii. 10.

† Ps. xlv. 1.

‡ Numb. x. 35. Ps. lxxix. 9.

§ Isa. lix. 1.

to love, and praise, and serve him. Yet to this we are indispensably bound, even while the painfullest view of our sorrows and wants is before our eyes : and therefore in the midst of our supplications, we proceed immediately to ascribe that glory to the sacred Three, which ever hath been, is, and will be their due, whether infinite wisdom allots to us prosperity or adversity. Nor is the mixture of doxologies with complaints less common in acts of worship than it is reasonable. The book of *Psalms* uses it frequently : the old *Latin* and *Greek* liturgies use it on this very occasion : and surely in our private devotions, even when most afflicted, we still give praise to God.

But though we own it our duty to glorify him in the severest sufferings, if it be his will that we should undergo them ; yet, conscious of our weakness, we go on to beg his protection against them, or deliverance of us from them, in mutual ejaculations of the utmost warmth : not that moving expressions will any otherwise incline him to grant mercy, than as they fit us to receive it, by imprinting on us a just sense of our dependence ; which, if used with sincerity, they naturally do.

Then we close this part of the litany with a more continued form of address to our merciful *Father* ; composed originally above 1100 years ago ; corrupted indeed afterwards, by intreating God to *turn from us all evils* for the sake of the intercession of his saints ; but reformed in our liturgy, not only by leaving out that addition, but by inserting, for completer security, a new clause : *Grant, that in all our troubles, we may put our whole trust and confidence in thy mercy.* And thus it is that we borrow from the church of *Rome*. By this prayer, so amended, we humbly confess our infirmities and unworthiness : yet beg, that notwithstanding both, we may, if God sees it proper, escape the afflictions which we fear : but if not, that being still assured of his goodness to us, we may, with *Job*, *though he slay us, trust in him* * : and that for a proof of this, we may as faithfully do our duty under the heaviest pressures, as the highest exaltation ; and evermore serve him in holiness and pureness of living, to his honour and

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* Job xiii. 15.

*glory; saying with Job again, Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil *? The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord †.*

What remains of the litany is the same with the conclusion of the morning and evening prayer; and therefore needs no separate explanation. May God give us grace to use these, and all our devotions, in so right a manner, that from praying to him amidst the troubles and sorrows of this world, we may be taken, in his good time, to praise him for ever amidst the joys of the next, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

* Job ii. 10.

† Job i. 21.

S E R M O N XCVII.

AN EXPLANATION AND DEFENCE OF THE LITURGY OF THE
CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

I COR. xiv. 15.

—*I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the Understanding also: I will sing with the Spirit, and I will sing with the Understanding also.*

ONCE more I intreat your attention to the subject, on which I have so often discoursed from these words. The part of it which remains is the communion service. But as that service is almost every where separated, and very properly, from the preceding one, by the singing of a psalm, I would first say a little concerning that much disregarded branch of worship.

As singing is capable of expressing strongly every state, in which the mind can be, towards every object; so there never was perhaps any one nation upon earth, civilized or barbarous, that did not make this a part of the honour paid by them to the God whom they adored. We find in the Old Testament it was practised by the *Jews*, before their law was given, as well as after *. The book of *Psalms* consists wholly of religious songs: and directs the *saints of the Lord*, to sing unto him, and give thanks for a remembrance of his holiness †: to sing unto the honour of his name, and make his praise glorious ‡: to sing praises unto our God, while we have our being §. The prophets foretell, that, in the gospel times, men shall sing for the majesty of the Lord: and, which brings the prediction home to us, they shall cry aloud, and glorify God, in the

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isles

* Exod. xv. 1, &c.

Pf. xxx.

† Pf. xvi. 2.

§ Pf. cxlvi. 2.

isles of the sea *. Accordingly St. Paul, not only himself with Silas, even in prison, *sang praises unto God* †: but appoints, that all Christians should *speak to themselves, and admonish one another, in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, making melody, with grace in their hearts, to the Lord* ‡. And St. James prescribes, *Is any one merry?* in a joyful frame on account of blessings received (for the word *mirth* comprehended anciently the most serious kinds of gladness) *let him sing psalms* §.

In pursuance of these rules, the first Christians made singing a constant part of their worship: as, besides the ecclesiastical writers, even a Heathen informs us ||. And the whole congregation joined in it. Afterwards indeed the singers by profession, who had been prudently appointed to lead and direct them, by degrees usurped the whole performance ¶. But at the reformation the people were restored to their rights: and it made a much quicker progress for the pleasure and comfort which they found in this practice; a circumstance that ought to endear it to considerate persons not a little. And as the only way of singing known in common parochial churches, is by the metre psalms, unless we join in that, we intirely omit this branch of our duty.

It is very true, the verse translation of the psalms generally used, is void of ornament; and hath expressions often low and flat, sometimes obsolete: and I wish a better were substituted in its place. But still, in many other cases, ancient solemn forms of words are thought venerable, when they are far from elegant: not to say, that the language of our forefathers, even where it may seem very uncouth at present, had in its time frequently full as much propriety and beauty as ours. And several words of it have been, for that reason, revived by some of our best modern authors. But at least the matter, comprised in the words of which I am speaking, is so highly respectable, that the mind which is affected only by the phrase, and not by the sense, must be a light one indeed.

Again, it is true also, that the tunes to which these psalms are sung, are most of them plain and flow; and the voices of many in the assembly unharmonious, and apt to be ill managed.

* Isa xxiv. 14, 15.

† Acts xvi. 23, 24, 25.

‡ Eph. v. 19. Col. iii. 16.

§ James v. 13.

|| Plin. l. x. Ep. 97.

¶ BINGHAM iii. 7, 2.

naged. But tunes, designed for the multitude to join in, who have never been regularly instructed, must be plain and slow, and such as they have been accustomed to: for which purpose the number should be moderate. Ours are many of them recommended, and as it were consecrated, by long usage. Confessors for the Protestant cause have composed them. Martyrs for it have yielded up their dying breath in them. And several of them are thought, by competent judges, no way deficient in real melody. Amongst a variety of people, part of them with bad ears, and most of them with untaught voices, there will be some that had better totally abstain; only attending to the sense, as well as the sound, of what is uttered by the rest: and others that should moderate themselves to a prudent degree of lowness, till they have learnt how to exert themselves more properly. But all who are, or can be qualified, and there are few who cannot, should bear such a part as they are able. It may be done, without in the least disordering the more skilful singers, who perform the very useful office of raising and supporting the tune. This, in many congregations, is done by the organ, the charity children, or both. But then the organ should express the tunes plainly and distinctly, and make very moderate intervals between the lines; the children should be taught to sing in exact time and concert with it; and the whole congregation should accompany them fervently, yet with prudence. Taking this care, though there should still happen to be some little discords, they would be intirely lost in the general chorus: the effect of which would be noble and elevating, if we took rightly into our thoughts the whole of the matter, instead of cavilling at minute particulars.

Consider the nature of a wild multitude, in its original savage state, met together at the call of some vehement ungoverned passion; how alarming the concourse, how frightful and horrid the confused and hideous cries of it must be. Then consider the same multitude, softened and cultivated by the gentle influences of religion, and unanimously assembling at stated seasons, to sing forth the praises of the wise and good Parent of all, and echo to each other the precepts of a rational, and mild, and beneficent life here, as the means of obtaining eternal felicity hereafter. Can there be a happier change of scene,

scene, a sweeter and more pleasing view? And suppose the harmony made by them were ever so little better than *shouting unto God with the voice of triumph*, as the scripture expresses it, and *making a joyful noise unto the Rock of their Salvation* *: yet what worthy, and humane, and pious heart is there, that would not be charmed with the sound, and zealously join in it? We are disposed thus on other occasions. Amongst our ancestors, who judged of propriety as discreetly as ourselves (to say no more), the very highest joined humbly and cheerfully with the lowest of their fellow Christians, in the duty of psalmody, however artlessly performed. And I intreat you to reflect what it is, either to disdain, or be ashamed, or be too indolent, to lift up our voices to the honour of our Maker, when we come into his house professedly to worship him, and he hath commanded that one part of his worship shall be this.

But if we will not employ our lips in the service, we may still fix our minds upon it; at least we should not hinder others from doing either. And particularly we should abstain from giving the bad example, and the offence, of indelicately holding conversation at that time; for which there cannot surely be so pressing an occasion, but that it may very safely be deferred till after church, if not altogether omitted.

In the singing of psalms, different persons use different postures. The prose psalms, I believe, are, and ever have been, repeated by all persons every where standing. In the verse psalms we all stand at the doxology. And in what goes before, the reason for doing it is exactly the same, and a very strong one; that the whole is sung to the glory of God, and often directly addressed to God. Accordingly we read in the Old Testament, that not only the *Levites* were to *stand every morning to thank and praise the Lord, and likewise at even* †, but that when *they waited with instruments of music to praise the Lord, all Israel stood* ‡; and again, that they said to the people, *stand up, and bless the Lord your God* §. We read likewise, that in a vision of St. *John*, in the book of *Revelation*, a great multitude, which no man could number, stood before the throne, and

cried

* Ps. xlvii. 1. xcv. 1.

† 2 Chron. vii. 6.

‡ 1 Chron. xxiii. 30.

§ Neh. ix. 5.

cried with a loud voice, *Salvation to our God* * : and in another, that *they who had gotten the victory over the beast, stood and sang the song of Moses, and of the Lamb* †. Standing, therefore, as it is plainly the fittest posture in itself, is the authorised one also : and were it more uncommon than it is, would be far from a dishonourable singularity. But still, as very many in most congregations, either have, by long habit, been prejudiced in favour of sitting, or, though they disapprove the custom, feel a difficulty of quitting it, unless every one did ; they should not be censured for a practice by which they mean nothing amiss ; but kindly encouraged to an alteration in this point, which we may thus hope will gradually become general.

And now I go on to the third morning office, which follows the psalm, and is called the *communion-service*, and read at the Lord's table, where it can with convenience, because the holy communion makes part of it ; though a part unhappily, now for many centuries, too often left out in almost all churches, which it never was originally in any : but, however, the rest is very proper to be used by itself. Anciently, as well as now, they who did not stay to receive the sacrament, were allowed to join in the beginning of the office : and from the middle ages downwards, the beginning hath been used, even where there was no sacrament, for a memorial, which might be useful, of the primitive practice.

The first thing we do in it, is repeating the Lord's Prayer ; which peculiarly suits this most solemn act of Christian worship. Then we proceed, in a very old and excellent collect, to beg of Him, *unto whom all hearts be open, so to cleanse the thoughts of ours, by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit*, by breathing into us, with lasting efficacy, good inclinations and purposes, *that we may, as perfectly as our present state admits, love him in our souls, and magnify him in our words and lives*. Purity of intention is both in general requisite for approaching God's altar, and more especially for going through the next part of the office aright : in which, after hearing the ten commandments rehearsed to us, we pray God to *have mercy upon us, and pardon us, so far as we have transgressed*
either

* Rev. vii. 9, 10.

† Rev. xv. 2, 3.

either the letter or the spirit of them, as explained by our blessed Redeemer, *and incline our hearts to keep* each of them better for the future. It doth not appear that this form of devotion was ever used in any liturgy before our own. But surely, taking the commandments with the gospel interpretation of them, it is a very instructive and edifying one. And they, who think the confession in the morning prayer not particular enough, have sufficient room here to supply that imagined defect.

Next follows a prayer for the king. The primitive Christians, in every public office, presented a supplication for their soveraign. Now in this office, unless it were put in the beginning, few in proportion would join in it when the sacrament is administered, considering how many return home without receiving. And therefore it is placed here, just after the ten commandments, of which the authority of the magistrate is one main support, as they are of that in return: and we pray the Almighty, that, *in mercy to his church, he will so rule the king's heart*, whom, in the course of his providence, he hath *chosen* to reign over us, and to be his *servant* and *minister to us for good**, *that he may, above all things, seek his glory*, by maintaining his laws above-mentioned: and will so *rule our hearts* likewise, and those of *all his subjects*, *that we may faithfully and humbly obey him: in God*, that is, in the strength of his grace, and in subordination, not contradiction to his supreme will; and *for God, not only for fear of man's wrath, but for conscience sake also*†.

Then we offer up the collect for the day, of which I have spoken already; and after it, read two portions of scripture, to which it hath frequently a reference. One of them is usually taken from the epistles, the other always from the gospels. The epistle hath been thus read certainly for 1300 years, but the gospel much longer. And the very portions that we now use, were most of them used on the same days 1200 years ago, and perhaps a great deal earlier. The annual course of them, and of the collects prefixed to them, began then, as it doth now, not with the civil year, or the entrance of the sun into this or that sign; but from the *advent*,
the

* Rom. xiii. 4.

† Ver. 5.

the approach of the appearance of Christ, *the Sun of Righteousness* *. And it was so contrived, that the former part, from his birth to his ascension, should represent to us the principal articles of his history; the latter, those of our own duty.

At the reading of the gospel, the people are directed to stand up, in honour of him whose life and words it relates. And there appears no time when they did otherwise; or when that acclamation, *Glory be to thee, O Lord*, was not made, which indeed at present is not prescribed, though it was in the first edition of *Edward the Sixth's* liturgy, but omitted afterwards, probably by accident; for there could be no objection raised against it.

As in the morning prayer, so in the communion-service, for the same reason, after reading the scripture, we recite the creed: only there we have that of the ancient *Latin* church, here that of the ancient *Greek*; made in the first general council, held at *Nice*, above 1400 years ago, and thence called *Nicene*; excepting that some small additions were inserted since, all of them, but one †, about 50 years after.

In this creed, we profess ourselves *to believe in one Lord Jesus Christ*, because some had spoken of the human and divine nature of our Saviour, which they called Jesus and Christ, as two persons not united. The words, *Light of Light*, intimating, that his divine nature is from the Father, as light is from the sun, or as one light, without diminution of itself, kindles another, were intended for some imperfect illustration (and doubtless a very imperfect one it is, and any other must be), of his mysterious generation. The words, *Lord, and Giver of Life*, ascribed to the Spirit, are not to be joined as one single attribute, but are taken from two different texts of scripture: in the one of which he is called, according to the marginal reading, *the Lord the Spirit* ‡; and said in the other *to give life* §, that is, the spiritual life of grace. The phrase, *who proceedeth from the Father and the Son*, may signify, either his deriving from the latter, as well as the former, his

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eternal

* Mal. iv. 2.

† Consisting of the words, *and the Son*; which came in some hundreds of years after. See *Nichols*.

‡ 2 Cor. iii. 18.

§ Ver. 6.

eternal subsistence ; or, since that hath been disputed between the *Latin* and *Greek* church, his being sent by both into the hearts of men, as the scripture plainly affirms he is*.

After the creed another psalm is sung : and then the minister, who is to preach, *moves the people*, by the direction of the 55th canon, *to join with him in a short form of prayer*. This was more particularly needful in past ages, when the sermons were commonly at a different hour from the liturgy, as they are still at our universities. And at whatever hour they were, great stress was laid on the use of this prayer for some time after the reformation ; because, when that took place, an acknowledgment of the king's supremacy, which the *Papists* denied, was very prudently, as things then stood, inserted into it. And hence it hath continued to our days, though it is frequently shortened into a collect and the Lord's Prayer, the reason for enlarging being now become less. The original manner of performing this part of the preacher's office was by *bidding*, that is, inviting and exhorting the people to pray for the several particulars mentioned by him ; which they were understood to do, either silently in their minds, as they went along with him, or by comprehending them all in the Lord's Prayer at last. But, in process of time, some imagined it better to put the whole into the shape of a direct address : others followed their example, as thinking it a matter of indifference : but most have kept to the old way. And the intention being the same, neither custom should give offence.

The sermon was anciently an explanation and improvement of the epistle and gospel just read before, especially the latter : but now, for a long time, a greater latitude hath been usefully taken.

After the sermon, one or more of the *sentences*, or scripture injunctions of bounty and almsgiving, as also the *prayer for the whole state of Christ's church*, are appointed to be read, *if there be no communion*, before the congregation be dismissed : neither of these things being ever unsuitable. And *the first day of the week* is recommended in scripture for purposes of charity †, as well as set apart for *making supplications, and giving*

* John xiv. 26. xv. 26. xvi. 7.

† 1 Cor. xvi. 2.

giving thanks for all men *. But they are both more peculiarly proper with a view to the communion; in which light I shall now consider them.

When we commemorate our Saviour's dying love to us all, we ought surely to think of expressing our love to our brethren; which must be shewn by promoting both their spiritual good and their temporal. To the former belong those sentences, which require that they who are able should contribute to the maintenance of a gospel ministry, where it wants their help. And they require it strongly, as you will perceive by reading them. For indeed we seldom or never read them to you, that we may not seem to plead our own cause; excepting in some few of our churches, where the primitive practice (needful in too many more), of giving oblations to the minister, as well as alms to the poor, at the sacrament, is preserved or restored. The rest of the sentences exhort to the latter duty, of relieving the sick and needy. What is generally given for them on this occasion, must be considered not as the whole, but a sample and earnest of your charity; I hope a small one in comparison of what you give at other times; and, I trust, is every where faithfully applied as it ought, with most religious and prudent care.

But as there are few in proportion to whom we can do good with our substance, and many that are much above our alms, yet greatly need our prayers, we proceed to offer them up *for the whole state of Christ's church militant*, that is, carrying on a warfare against the enemies of the soul *here on earth*: that all the members of it may not only have *the spirit*, the fervent desire, *of truth, unity, and concord*, but may actually agree *in the truth of God's holy word, and live in unity and godly love*. Then we petition more especially for those, whose stations, as kings, magistrates, and clergy, or whose sufferings of any kind require it most: and give thanks for those who are got beyond the reach of sufferings; begging, that we may *follow their example*, as far as it was a good one, and share in their happiness.

The two *exhortations* ordered to be used, one or other of them, *when warning of the communion is given*, are seldom

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used,

* 1 Tim. ii. 1.

used, where it returns too frequently and flatedly to need warning. However, they have a great deal in them that ought to be seriously weighed; but nothing that wants to be explained at present, unless it be the direction laid down, that they, who *cannot quiet their own consciences*, as to their spiritual state, and fitness for the sacrament, should *open their grief to some discreet and learned minister of God's word, that they may receive the benefit of absolution*, if they appear intitled to it, *together with ghostly*, that is, *spiritual counsel*. Now here, you see, this private absolution is not affirmed to be, as it is by the Papists, necessary for all persons, but only adviseable for some. It therefore is only a declaration of the minister's judgment, a fallible one indeed; but the proper and appointed one, that if the person's case be truly represented, he is pardoned and absolved by our heavenly Father, who alone can forgive sins. And such credit only is due to this declaration, as in other affairs we allow to authorised professors and practitioners of skill and probity, whose opinions we often think it prudent to ask, and happy to have in our favour: and God forbid that we should not give you ours, when we are asked it, with as much fidelity, and as much secrecy, as any ministers of any church whatever.

There is the less occasion that I should enlarge on this office, because I have explained in my lectures on the church catechism, the principal points relating to the Lord's Supper. I have shewn you in particular, that the expression of *eating and drinking damnation to ourselves* (which is used by St. Paul in his first epistle to the *Corinthians* *, and from thence taken into the exhortation at the communion), means only bringing upon ourselves a condemnation to some punishment from God, without determining of what kind. For the verses immediately following (which I shall presently repeat to you), very clearly show, that the word in the original, which is here translated *damnation*, ought to have been rendered in this place, as it is in several others, *judgment*. Now *judgment* is a general term, that signifies any degree of correction or punishment, in this life or the next. That which had been incurred by those unworthy receivers, to whom the apostle wrote,

* Ch. xi. 29.

wrote, was only correction in the present life. For undoubtedly he told them the worst of their danger, and he tells them of nothing else. The very next words are: *For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep, are dead.* Then follows, what entirely clears up the matter: *If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.* The punishment therefore of receiving unworthily, will either be extended to another world, or confined to this, according to the degree of the fault: and if we repent sincerely and in time, it will be forgiven in both. When in the same exhortation we are required to *judge ourselves* THEN, this by no means implies, that we need not do it before, but that we should take care it be now perfected. And when it is said, that we *must above all things give thanks to God*, the meaning is not that faith and repentance are less necessary; but that these being supposed to precede, the principal point in the act of communicating is a thankful remembrance of God's mercy, disposing us to lay hold of it.

From this last exhortation, we proceed immediately to the first thing recommended in it, a penitent confession of our sins; which the ancient church made also on the same occasion. When in this we say, that *the burthen of them is intolerable*, we mean not always that the sorrow, which we that instant feel for them, is extreme: for though very sincere, it may be imperfect in its degree; or though as perfect as the constitution of our mind and body admits, it may not be very passionate and afflicting; or though it were once so, it may now be moderated by a joyful sense of God's mercy to us; but we mean, that the weight with which our guilt, if not removed, will finally sit heavy on our souls, is unspeakably greater than we shall be able to bear.

After this confession, the minister, himself one of the sinners who hath joined in it, agreeably to the duty of his office, assures the people, that *God hath promised forgiveness to all that turn to him* as they ought; and earnestly prays that they may obtain it; adding express authorities of scripture to confirm their faith and hope.

Then he exhorts them, thus comforted, to *lift up their hearts*, and *give thanks to God*: which words, with the answers,

swers, and the substance of all that follows constantly, as far as, *Glory be to thee, O Lord most high*, appear to have been used in the communion-service 1500 years ago; and might probably descend from the apostolic times. Even the custom of appropriating particular prefaces to the more considerable festivals, is 1200 years old, if not more.

And now, approaching nearer to the act of receiving, we again solemnly acknowledge our own unworthiness, as all the old liturgies did, though not so fully: and pray, *that our sinful bodies may be made clean by Christ's body, and our souls washed through his most precious blood*: which expressions have been censured, as if they implied, that each of these, at least the latter of them (his blood) had some peculiar efficacy, of which the other was destitute. But this cannot be intended: because very soon after, *the preservation of our bodies and souls also unto everlasting life*, is ascribed separately, both to his body and to his blood, as it is in scripture also*. Therefore the distinction made here, was only meant for some kind of elegance in speech: and it much resembles what St. Clement the Roman, whom St. Paul intitles his fellow-labourer†, hath said in his epistle to the Corinthians, that Christ gave *his flesh for our flesh, and his soul for our souls*‡.

After this follows the prayer of consecration, or setting apart the bread and wine to the sacred purpose in which they are about to be employed. A prayer hath been used for that end, at least 1600 years. And the mention which ours makes of the institution of the Lord's Supper, from the words, *who in the same night that he was betrayed*, to the conclusion, is in every old liturgy in the world. The Romanists have put into their prayer of consecration, names of saints, and commemorations of the dead, which we have thrown out. And indeed we have left nothing that so much as needs explaining; unless it may be useful to observe to you, that our Saviour's *one oblation of himself* is opposed to the various kinds of oblations under the law; and, *once offered*, to the continual repetition of them; though probably a further view was to intimate, that he is not, as the Papists pretend, really sacrificed anew in this holy ordinance.

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* Heb. x. 10, 19.

† Phil. iv. 3.

‡ Sect. 49.

The first part of the words which the minister speaks at delivering the elements, is very ancient : the rest is added by our church ; and the whole is unexceptionable. The posture of kneeling which we use, when we receive, is a very proper one. Some indeed think, that the apostles received in the posture which they used at meals, and that we ought to imitate them in this. Now, if so, to imitate them strictly, we must not sit (as these persons do) but lie all along ; for so did the apostles at table. But indeed we may rather suppose, that when our Saviour blessed the bread and wine, this being an address to God, both he and they were in some posture of adoration : and that they changed it before receiving, is not likely, considering how different that was from a common meal. Nor does it appear, that any part of the Christian church, till of late years, ever used any other posture than that of kneeling or standing ; by each of which they meant to signify worship. We use the former : but with an express declaration inserted in all our prayer-books, that *no adoration is hereby intended, or ought to be done, either to the sacramental bread and wine (for that were idolatry, to be abhorred of all Christians), or to any corporal presence of Christ's natural flesh and blood ; for they are in heaven, and not here* *. We kneel therefore only to adore the invisible God ; and to be in a fit posture for those prayers and praises which can never be more properly offered up to him. And why any persons should prefer a different posture, we cannot see.

Having communicated, we again repeat, after a long interval, the Lord's Prayer. For since, *to as many as truly receive him, he gives power to become the sons of God* † ; we may hope we have now strengthened our title to apply, under that name, to *Our Father which is in heaven, &c.*

Then we *intirely*, that is, with our whole hearts, *desire him to accept this our sacrifice, or service, of praise and thanksgiving*, which we have offered up to him : begging leave, at the same time, to *offer up ourselves, body and soul*, as dedicated to his will ; which is the great end of all our devotions ; yet never mentioned in the *Romish* mass-book. We pray also once more for the whole church ; and lastly for our fellow-communicants,

* Rubric after Communion.

† John i. 12.

municants, as well as ourselves, that we may be *fulfilled*, that is, filled full, and, as the Psalmist expresses it, *abundantly satisfied* *, *with God's grace and benediction*.

After this, as our blessed Lord sung an hymn † with his disciples after the passover (in imitation of whom the whole Christian church hath used one in commemorating *Our Passover, sacrificed for us* ‡), we use one likewise, as ancient, in substance, as the fourth century at least. It were better, indeed, that we sung it; if there did not, alas, often want numbers, and generally skill. The beginning of it is the song of the holy angels in *St. Luke*: on which foundation we proceed to *glorify* God, and *give thanks to him for his great glory*; meaning, that of his goodness, wisdom and power, displayed in the work of our redemption: fervently beseeching *the Son and Lamb of God*, that his sufferings to *take away the sins of the world*, and his *sitting at the right hand of the Majesty on High* §, may bring down *mercy upon us*: and acknowledging, that we are all impure, *He only is holy*; men and angels are servants, *He only is the Lord*; *He only with the Holy Ghost*, united to the *Father in glory* unspeakable, is *Most High* above all.

To this act of worship we subjoin (drawing now to a conclusion), one or more of those brief, but comprehensive collects, which are provided for that purpose. In the first of them, some have objected against the phrase, *Chances of this mortal life*, as implying somewhat irreligious. But our Saviour hath not scrupled to say, *And by chance there came down a certain priest* ||. Again in the fourth, which is also frequently used before sermon, some have stumbled at the expression, *Prevent us, O Lord, in all our doings*: because preventing most commonly signifies hindering. But the original meaning, and the true one here is, *Go before us*: which may indeed be either to further us by opening the way, or to obstruct us by stopping it. But surely it can no more be doubted which we intend, than what *David* intended, when he said, *Thou shalt prevent him with the blessings of goodness* ¶; and again, *The God of my mercy shall prevent me* **. The others, I think, have no difficulties.

What

* Ps. xxxvi. 8. † Matt. xxvi. 30. ‡ I Cor. v. 7. § Heb. i. 3.

|| Luke x. 31.

¶ Ps. xxi. 3.

** Ps. lix. 10.

What remains is the solemn and affectionate form of dismissal ; most of which is taken from the words of holy writ. The minister of Christ in pronouncing it, prays, that *the peace of God, which passeth all understanding*, that inward sense of our Maker's goodness to us, which even now is delightful, beyond the conception of those who have not experienced it ; and shall hereafter be so heightened, as vastly to exceed the present conceptions of the best of us ; *may keep our hearts and minds* *, our judgments and affections, *in the knowledge and love of God and his Christ* : and that every *blessing of the Holy Trinity may be distributed amongst us, and remain with us always*. Grant this, O Heavenly Father, for the sake, &c.

* Phil. iv. 7.

S E R M O N XCVIII.

THE SACRED SCRIPTURES THE ONLY INFALLIBLE RULE OF
FAITH AND PRACTICE.

I PET. v. 12.

—*Exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God
wherein ye stand.*

THE happiness of all creatures depends entirely on their obedience to his will whose sovereign power created and rules the world. Now the will of God is made known to us in part by natural reason; and they who have no other law, shall be judged by that alone. But as reason was unable to teach mankind a great number of things very important to be known, and, in fact, did teach most of them but a small part of what it might have done, God was mercifully pleased to superadd the light of revelation to it, and place us under the conduct of both jointly. Such an additional provision, it might have been hoped, had cleared up all doubts; but partly the weakness, partly the wickedness of men, hath turned even this light into darkness, and made it multiply disputes instead of ending them. Still we have no reason to be discouraged; for every upright and considerate person, may, after all, with due care, very easily see his way before him clearly enough to walk in it. But we have great reason to use this care, and make such enquiry amidst the different paths which different persons point out to us, as will give us cause to be satisfied we choose the right. Now of all the different opinions which have risen concerning the Christian religion, there have been few so remarkable as that which divides this part of the world into *Popish* and *Protestant*. Those
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of the former communion, it seems, think us of the latter quite out of the way to salvation, and accordingly are unwearied in persuading, as they have opportunity, the members of our church, especially the lower and more ignorant part of them, to quit it for theirs. The necessity of doing this, they insist upon sometimes with so much plausibility, and always with so much confidence, that I hope you will not think a few discourses ill employed on a subject of such very great importance, both to our private satisfaction and public security, in refuting the arguments they usually bring against us, and *testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand.* To proceed regularly in this matter, I shall

I. Inquire what is the rule of Christian faith and life: and

II. Examine by this rule the peculiar doctrines and practices of the *Romish* church.

I. I shall inquire what is the rule of Christian faith and life: from whence we are to learn what things our religion requires as necessary, and what it forbids as unlawful: for, if we do the one, and avoid the other, we are undoubtedly safe. Now, as Jesus Christ is the sole *author of our faith* *, those things, and those alone, which he taught himself, and commissioned his disciples to teach, are parts of our faith. What his doctrine was we find in no less than four accounts of his life and preaching given in the gospels. To what belief his disciples converted men, we find in the Acts. What they taught men after their conversion, we read in the epistles. These several books, which make up the New Testament, all Christians allow to contain an original and undoubtedly true account of our religion. The only possible question is, whether they contain a full and clear account? Now such a one they, without question, intended to give, for what could induce them designedly to give any other? Besides, St. *Luke*, in the very beginning of his gospel, tells us, that *having a perfect understanding of those things which were believed amongst Christians, he had taken in hand to set forth a declaration of them*, that those he wrote to might know the certainty of what they had been instructed in. And St. *John*, in the conclusion

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* Heb. xii. 2.

of his, tells us, that though our Saviour *did*, and doubtless said also, *many things that were not written in that book*, yet *these*, says he, *are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name* *. This being then their intention, can we possibly think they failed of it? Two of the evangelists at least were constantly present at our Saviour's discourses, the other two heard them either from him, or his immediate followers, and they had the promise of his Spirit *to bring all things to their remembrance whatsoever he had said unto them* †. Could they after all forget any part of this that was material and necessary? That any of them should do so is very strange, much more that they all should. That St. *Luke*, the companion of the apostles, and the writer of their acts, that he too, in relating what they taught their converts, should unhappily omit any thing essential, still adds to the wonder: and that no one of the many epistles written to instruct the churches in their faith and duty, should supply this defect, is beyond all belief.

But supposing the scripture ever so perfect in itself, yet the church of *Rome* objects that it is not clear to us: even to the learned many things are hard to be understood, which therefore to the unlearned must be impossible. Nay, sometimes they tell us not one sentence of it hath a meaning, which by our own private judgment we can be certain of. But surely the apostles were not worse writers *with* a divine assistance, than others commonly are *without* it. What they spoke and preached was plain, else they spoke to no purpose: and why should not the same things be as plain when they were written down? Some passages indeed might to some persons be difficult even at first, and more are doubtless become so by length of time. But that the main of the New Testament is intelligible enough, cannot be with any modesty denied. And for the rest, what at first sight is difficult, may with due consideration of our own, and help of others, be made easy; what is obscurely expressed in one place, may be clearly expressed in another; and what is clearly expressed in no place, we may safely, for that very reason, conclude it is not necessary for us to understand or believe.

But

* John xx. 30, 31.

† John xiv. 26.

But allowing the scriptures to have been at first sufficiently intelligible, how do we know they are come down to us uncorrupted? I answer, by all the same arguments which prove the incorruptness of any other ancient book in the world, and by this argument farther, that these books having many more copies of them, being much wider dispersed, and much more carefully read, and warmly disputed about, than any other whatever; it is in proportion more incredible that either chance or design should alter them, in any thing considerable, without discovery from some quarter, even were no particular providence to watch over writings so worthy of its care. And accordingly, in fact, amidst all the various readings which such a number of copies must produce, there is not one that affects the least article of our religion. But if ever so faithfully preserved, still how shall the unlearned know when they are faithfully translated? Why, most passages all parties agree in, and on those they disagree about, common sense, comparison of other texts, consideration of what goes before and after, and consulting, as opportunity offers, judicious and honest persons of different persuasions, will enable any person to pass a sufficient judgment, so far as he is concerned to judge, which is right and which is wrong, which is clear and which is doubtful. Indeed there is in general but little danger of any gross impositions upon men being attempted, much less succeeding, for any continuance, in a land of knowledge and freedom, whatever may be, or hath been, under Popish tyranny and darkness. Since therefore the scriptures contain a full and clear account of Christianity, written by the very apostles and first disciples of our Lord himself, and honestly delivered down into our hands, we have plainly such a rule for our faith as all men in all cases are ever satisfied with; nor have we any need to look farther. And yet the farther we do look into other pretended rules, the better we shall be satisfied with that we have already. For, let what will be said against scripture, as not being a sufficient rule, it must be a sufficient one, unless there be some other; and, upon a fair examination, it will evidently appear there is no other. The *Romanists* indeed tell us of one which they speak of in very high terms, and that is the traditionary doctrine of what they call the Catholic Church. The apostles, they say, instructed

instructed their converts very diligently in every article of faith. Those converts again, knowing it to be their indispensable duty, could not fail to instruct, with the same diligence, ministers their flocks, parents their children, every Christian his neighbour. And thus, by a continued succession of teaching, all the doctrines of religion are handed down in their church, they tell us, uncorrupted to this day. Whoever either added, omitted, or changed any thing, must, they think, by every one round him, be immediately charged with a mistake; and, if he persisted in it, convicted of a heresy, whilst the rest were confirmed in the ancient truth. And therefore to hold what the church holds, is a rule that can never mislead us. Now it must be owned indeed, that our Saviour delivered his doctrine to the apostles, and they to all the world by word of mouth; and this way of delivering at first was sufficient; and therefore St. Paul exhorts the *Thessalonians*, to hold fast the traditions he had taught them, whether by word or by letter *. But then, in the nature of things, how long could this last? Suppose but the easiest common story were to be told from one person to another, without being written down, for only 100 or 200 years, and let each person, as he received it, have ever so strict a charge to tell it in the same manner; yet, long before the end of that time, what security could we possibly have that it was true at first, and unaltered still? And you cannot but see there is much less security, that a considerable number of doctrines, especially such as compose the *Popish* creed, should be brought down safe for 1700 years together, through so many millions of hands, that were all liable, through ignorance, forgetfulness, and superstition, to mistake them, or, through knavery and design, to alter them. But it will be said, in a case of such importance as religion, men would be more careful in delivering truth than in others. Undoubtedly they ought; but who can be secure that they would? It is of equal importance to be careful in practising it too; yet we all know how this hath been neglected in the world; and therefore have reason to think the other hath been no less so. But whoever made the first change, they say, must have been immediately discovered.

* 2 Thess. ii. 15.

discovered. Now, so far from this, that persons make changes in what they relate, without discovering it themselves; alterations come in by insensible degrees: one man leaves out, or varies, or adds one little circumstance; the next, another; till it grow imperceptibly into a different thing. In one age a doctrine is delivered as a probable opinion; the following age speaks of it as certain truth; and the third advances it into an article of faith. Perhaps an opposition rises upon this, as many have done: some have said such a doctrine *was* delivered to them, others that it was not: and who can tell whether at last the right side or the wrong have prevailed? Only this is certain, that whichever prevails, though by a small majority at first, will use all means of art and power to make it appear an universal consent at last, and then plead uninterrupted tradition. But though such things as these may possibly be done in almost any age, yet they are easy to be done in such ages, as were five or six of those, that preceded the reformation; when, by the confession of their own historians, both clergy and laity were so universally and so monstrously ignorant and vicious, that nothing was too bad for them to do, or too absurd for them to believe. But still they tell us, we Protestants receive it upon the authority of tradition, that scripture is the word of God: and why can we not as well receive other things upon the same authority? I answer, we receive scripture by no means upon the authority of tradition merely; much less the tradition of their present church; but partly on account of its own reasonableness, and the characters of divine wisdom in it; partly from the testimony which one part of it bears to the other; and lastly, upon the written evidence given us, chiefly indeed by the earliest Christians, but in some measure also by Jews and Heathens themselves, that the authors of these books were the disciples of our Lord, and the things said by them true. But then to tell us, that because we receive scripture upon this evidence, we must therefore receive a long list of doctrines upon mere tradition, after 17 ages, is to affirm that the memory of things may be as well preserved for ever, by general rumour and hearsay, as by authentic records. But here they plead, that the tradition which they depend on, is not altogether unwritten, but partly recorded by the ancient fathers of the church. To this

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we answer, that we acknowledge truly ancient writers, in matters where they all agree, to be a very valuable evidence of the faith, though at the same time a fallible one. And we can prove undeniably, that these writers, in proportion as they lived near the days of the apostles, were of our faith, not theirs. But as this is a proof in our favour, that few persons are capable of entering into, so we have happily a much shorter. For if antiquity be an argument, the greater the antiquity, the stronger the argument: and therefore the authority of the Bible, for this, as well as many other reasons, is the strongest of all. An original account is always to be depended on in the first place. Such others, as come a little after, in point of time, may be of considerable use to illustrate and confirm the former; but, wherever they appear to contradict it, must be rejected without scruple. And those which come a great deal after, such as the church of *Rome* chiefly depends on, deserve little or no credit. The Spirit of God therefore, seeing the need there would be of it, inspired the apostles and evangelists to deliver a full and clear rule of faith, to all posterity, in the New Testament: certainly not that this might be interpreted afterwards by tradition into whatever sense men pleased (for then tradition alone had done as well or better without it), but that tradition, as often as it went wrong, might be rectified by this. Had not Christianity been committed in the earliest ages to writing, long before this time, in all probability, there had been scarce one doctrine of it left, which we could have been secure was genuine. And though tradition hath doubtless been preserved, by having some regard to scripture, from degenerating and varying near so much as it would else, yet, for want of having a sufficient regard to it, first needless, then uncertain, then false and pernicious, articles of belief have crept in among Christians; the very steps of whose entry, for the most part, we can trace. The faith of the first ages changed by little and little every age after, and still for the worse; till at length the church of *Rome*, about 200 years ago, at the council of *Trent*, when they were called upon to reform these abuses, most shamefully chose to establish them under the venerable name of primitive tradition, and condemn all who will not receive them with the same regard as scripture itself. Just

as in our Saviour's time it was among the *Jews*, who asked, *why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders?* And he said unto them, *Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition* *. And just as St. Paul had foretold it would happen among Christians. *Beware, lest any man spoil you through vain deceit, after the tradition of men, and not after Christ* †. But here they reply, that, let this passage be designed against whom it will, it cannot possibly fall on them. For, however uncertain tradition might become of itself in process of time, and however difficult it may be for private persons to judge of doctrines by it, yet the judgment of the catholic church, in these points, is infallible, and theirs is that catholic church. Now, that the church is infallible, they sometimes attempt to prove from reason. Making it so was the only way to end disputes, and therefore God being wise and good, *must* have made it so. But certainly a much more effectual way of preventing disputes and errors, had been to have made every single man infallible; and yet God hath not done this. It might therefore be more modest for them to let him shew his wisdom and goodness in what way he pleases. The *Jewish* church, we know, was not infallible; for they denied their Saviour, and it was by following tradition that they came to do it. How then does it appear that the Christian must be more infallible? Why, they have texts of scripture to prove this. But if, as they commonly tell us, the scripture can neither be proved nor understood but by the infallible authority of the church, how can the infallible authority of the church be proved or understood but by scripture? However, let us hear these texts. Our Saviour told his apostles, that the Comforter *should come, and lead them into all truth* ‡. But perhaps this was said only to the apostles: and, had it been said to them and their successors, or, which is still a different thing, to the whole church; yet so St. John § tells all believers *they have an unction from the holy one, and know all things*; that is, things necessary: not that they were not capable of mistaking, but that, with due care, they might avoid it if they would. Again he promised his disciples, that *he would be*

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* Mark vii. 5, 9. † Col. ii. 8. ‡ John xvi. 13. § 1 John ii. 20.

with them to the end of the world *. And so he hath promised every single Christian to be *with them, and dwell with them* †: yet this does not hinder but they may both misunderstand, and even renounce Christianity, if they please. But he declares also, that *the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church* ‡. But *the gates of hell*, or, as it might be translated, of the invisible world, mean nothing else than the power of death, *i. e.* the terror of persecution, as the learned well know. And it can never follow, that because persecution shall not destroy the church, error shall not corrupt it. Or were this expression, the *gates of hell*, to comprehend error, it must at least equally comprehend sin. And therefore, as this promise does not hinder the church universal from being more or less defiled by sin, so neither from being deformed by error. And the most our Saviour meant to promise, is, that neither shall totally abolish, though, through the faults of men, both may greatly pollute it. They plead farther, that St. Paul says, the *church of God is the pillar and ground of the truth* §: but they know at the same time, that this passage of St. Paul is fairly capable of two other translations, either of which turns it to a different sense. Or were this the only sense, we acknowledge the church was then, and ought always to be, and in some measure always is, a pillar and support of truth; and so in his proportion is every believer: and therefore of every single good Christian our Saviour says, in the *Revelation* ||, *I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God*. But then it does not follow from hence, that any one Christian, or the majority of Christians, so support the truth, as that they do, and ever will, profess it all, without any mixture of error; and unless this be done, there is no infallibility. But they argue farther, that our Saviour directs ¶, *If a man neglect to bear the church, let him be unto thee as a Heathen man and a Publican*. But what is he there speaking of? Let us read the context. *If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between him and thee alone. If he will not hear thee, take with thee one or two more. If he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church. If he neglect to hear the church,*
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* Matt. xxviii. 20.

† 2 Cor. vi. 16.

‡ Matt. xvi. 18.

§ 1 Tim. iii. 15.

|| Rev. iii. 12.

¶ Matt. xviii. 17.

let him be unto thee as a Heathen man and a Publican. That is, if a man have done you an injury, first admonish him privately of it. If that avail not, tell the church: not the universal church sure throughout all the world, but the particular one you both belong to. And if he will not reform upon their reproof, look on him no longer as a true Christian, but an ill man. Here therefore is not one word said about disobeying the determination of the catholic church concerning a disputed doctrine; but about fighting the admonition of a particular church concerning a known sin; and particular churches are owned to be fallible.

Again, they say it is an article of our creed, that we *believe in the catholic church*. But then they know the meaning of this is not that we believe whatever this church, or any who please to call themselves so, shall at any time assert. But, as believing in the resurrection of the body, is only believing that such a resurrection shall be; so believing in the catholic church, is only believing that such a church is: that Christ hath united his followers into one regular society or body, of which himself is the head: which society or church is therefore called catholic or universal, because it consists of all nations; whereas the *Jewish* church was not catholic, but particular, consisting only of one nation. But whether this church be infallible or not, the creed says nothing. They that can lay a stress on such wretched arguments as these, how would they have triumphed, had the same things been said of their church, that are said of the *Jewish* church? *If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment, says Moses, thou shalt come unto the Priests and the Levites, that shall be in those days, and thou shalt observe to do according to all that they shall inform thee; thou shalt not decline from the sentence that they shall shew thee, to the right hand nor to the left**; for by their words shall every controversy be tried†. The Scribes and Pharisees, says our Saviour, *sit in Moses' seat. All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do* ‡. Now if these very strong expressions did not prove that church infallible (as certainly they do not, for then Christianity, which they rejected, would not be true), how can much

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* Deut. xvii. 8, &c.

† Deut. xxi. 5.

‡ Matt. xxiii. 3.

weaker expressions prove any other to be so? But they who will needs have the church to be infallible, and the rule of our faith instead of scripture, what part of it do they make the infallibility reside in? For unless that be clearly known, we are never the better for it; but instead of the same rule of faith, every different opinion about this matter will produce a different rule of faith. And it is a matter in which the opinions of the *Romanists* differ greatly. Many of them say the Pope is infallible, and he himself claims to be so. But then some think he is so in matters of faith only, some in matters of fact too. In most Popish countries it would be looked upon as heresy to deny him this prerogative, in others as great wickedness to ascribe it to him. For a large part of them say nothing is infallible under a general council regularly called. But then they have so many different opinions about what makes a council general, and what call of one is regular, that some of them reckon at least eighteen general councils, and some at most but seven or eight; and indeed they might very justly question whether, strictly speaking, there was ever such a one in the world. But farther: which of the decrees and canons of these councils, amongst the infinite forgeries there have been, are genuine, and which not: Here again is an endless controversy; and another as endless, what the meaning of some of the most important ones of them is. In consequence of this they differ and dispute, and have done for ages (as united as they would seem to be), not only about such silly questions, as whether the virgin *Mary* was conceived in original sin or not (and yet about this they were calling one another heretics for 300 years, and their general councils, with all their infallibility, have not dared to determine the matter to this day), but they quarrel equally about things of the greatest moment. To give but one instance of many: whether a king may, for heresy and disobedience to the church, be deposed, and his subjects discharged of their allegiance, is a question of as much weight as can well be put. The Popes, and great part of their church, for 600 years, have held they might, and have practised accordingly, as most nations in their turns have felt. But what tradition hath taught, and general councils have decreed on this point, is so various and contradictory, that it would take a man's life

life almost to inquire into it. So that some *Papist* writers speak of the affirmative of this question as an article of faith, and some as a most impious error. One or the other must be impious undoubtedly. Which then are the heretics? and what is their infallibility good for, that either cannot, or will not, decide questions of such importance to human society as this? But to proceed: Some of that communion allow not even councils to be infallible, and account no doctrine fundamental, unless the whole body of the *Roman* church hath received it as such. And how shall the ignorant know with certainty when they have all received it, and in what sense they have received it? But why the whole body of the *Roman* church? What claim hath she of being always in the right more than the churches of *Greece*, of *Asia*, or *Ethiopia*, who differ from her, as well as we, in many things, and allow her no such privilege? Nor, which is more, did *St. Paul* know of any she had in the least; but in his epistle to the church of *Rome*, bids her *not to be high-minded, but fear: for if God spared not the Jews, take heed, lest he also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: On them, severity; but towards thee, goodness; if thou continue in his goodness, otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.* Strange treatment, sure, of an infallible church! Some persons therefore have held infallibility to reside not in the church of *Rome* particularly, but in the whole body of Christians considered as one, which indeed is the only true catholic, or universal church. But the whole body of Christians, in the nature of things, can never meet: and, were it as easy as it is difficult, to collect their several opinions, what one point should we find them all in all ages agree in as necessary, besides those general doctrines of Christianity, that are on every hand allowed to be clearly contained in scripture? Which way soever then we seek for a rule of faith, to scripture-doctrine we must return; and therefore the best way is never to depart from it.

But here some of the *Romanists* (for they differ about it) will say we wrong them. They admit scripture for the rule of faith: but do they admit it for the only one? This they dare not say; or, if they did, will they allow us, when we have this rule, to know what it means? No, we must never understand

understand the least part of it, though ever so plain, in any different sense from what the church is pleased to appoint. What then is this but mocking mankind, and giving with one hand, what they immediately take away with the other? But we, they say, are in a pitiable condition; that, having only the dead letter of scripture to go by, and no living guide or judge to direct us in the interpretation of it as they have, controversies are always rising among us, and can never be decided. To this we answer, that controversies are what they themselves, even with persecution to help them, can neither prevent or end any more than we. And in matters of property indeed, some decision, right or wrong, must be made. Society could not subsist without it: but what need of an infallible decision in matters of faith? Why is it not sufficient that every man determine for himself as well as he can in this world; and that God, the only infallible judge, will determine with equity concerning us all in the next? But the generality of people, they say, are incapable of judging for themselves. Yet the New Testament supposes them both capable of it, and bound to it; and accordingly requires them not only to *try the spirits*, the pretences to infallibility, *whether they be of God* *, but to *prove all things, and hold fast that which is good* †. But were this otherwise; if they are incapable of judging, why do you persuade them to change their judgment? Let them alone in the way they are in. But if they have judgment enough to determine whether the catholic church be infallible, whether the church of *Rome* be the catholic church, whether this infallibility be in Pope or council, which decrees of either are genuine, and what is the true meaning of those decrees, all which things they must determine, before the infallibility of the church can be any guide to them: if, I say, every plain man hath ability enough for such points as these, why hath he not ability enough, in other cases, to understand common sense and plain scripture: to judge whether transubstantiation, for instance, be not contrary to the one, and image-worship to the other? The *Romanists* themselves own, that men must use their eyes to find this guide: why then must they afterwards put them out to follow him? especially considering that the only rule, which
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* 1 John iv. 1.

† 1 Thess. v. 21.

above ninety-nine parts in a hundred of their communion have to follow, is not the doctrine of councils and Popes, even were they infallible (for of these it is infinitely harder to know any thing than of scripture), but merely what a few priests and private writers tell them; and so at last all the pretence to being directed by infallibility ends in being led blindfold by men, confessedly as fallible as themselves. But all Christians are commanded, they say, to *obey them that have the rule over them in the Lord* *. And it is true, the teaching of the ministers of the gospel ought to be attended upon; their doctrine followed in all clear cases; and their judgment respected, even in doubtful ones. But still we are no more bound to follow our spiritual guides into opinions plainly false, or practices plainly sinful, than to follow a common guide down a precipice, or into the sea, let our own knowledge of the way be ever so little, or the other pretences to infallible skill in it ever so great. The rule therefore for the unlearned and ignorant in religion is this: Let each man improve his own judgment, and increase his own knowledge as much as he can; and be fully assured that God will expect no more. In matters for which he must rely on authority, let him rely on the authority of that church which God's providence hath placed him under, rather than another which he hath nothing to do with; and trust those, who, by encouraging free inquiry, appear to love truth, rather than such as, by requiring all their doctrines to be implicitly obeyed, seem conscious that they will not bear to be fairly tried. But never let him prefer any authority before that which is the highest of all authority, the written word of God. This therefore let us all carefully study, and not doubt but that whatever things in it are necessary to be believed, are easy to be understood. This let us firmly rely on, and trust to its truth, when it declares itself *able to make us wise unto salvation, perfect, and thoroughly furnished unto all good works* †. Let others build on fathers and popes, on traditions and councils, what they will: let us continue firm, as we are, *on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief corner stone* ‡.

* Heb. xiii. 17.

† 2 Tim. iii. 13—17.

‡ Eph. ii. 20.

S E R M O N X C I X .

THE SACRED SCRIPTURES THE ONLY INFALLIBLE RULE OF
FAITH AND PRACTICE.

I PET. v. 12.

—*Exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God
wherein ye stand.*

THE general rule of conduct for men to go by is reason :
contrary to what this plainly teaches, we neither can
nor ought to believe ; but beyond what it teaches, on suffi-
cient authority, we justly may. Persuasion, founded on au-
thority, is called faith : and that which is founded on the au-
thority of our blessed Lord, Christian faith.

Now the rule of this faith, the only means by which we,
who live so many ages after him, can learn with certainty
what things he hath required as necessary, and what he hath
forbidden as unlawful, I have proved to be the holy scrip-
tures. For these, which confessedly give us a true account
of Christianity, do also, as I have shewn to you, give us a
full and sufficiently clear account of it : and there is none
whatever besides that can be equally depended on. Other
antiquity, compared with that of scripture, is modern ; tradi-
tion, in its own nature, soon grows uncertain ; and infallibi-
lity is no where to be found upon earth. The only thing
then we have to rely on in Christianity is the written word
of God. Whatever this forbids is sinful ; whatever it re-
quires, as a condition of salvation, is necessary ; whatever it
does not so require, is not necessary. By these rules there-
fore of reason and scripture, let us now proceed, as was pro-
posed in the second place, to try the chief of those doctrines
which distinguish the church of *Rome* from ours.

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To begin with that which is naturally first, the object of worship. We worship God, and pray to him through the mediation of Jesus Christ. This they acknowledge to be right. The saints in heaven we love and honour as members of the same mystical body with ourselves. The holy angels we reverence as the ministers of the divine will. But as for praying to either, there being no argument for it in reason, nor precept in scripture, nor indeed example in antiquity, for at least 300 years after scripture, it surely cannot be a thing necessary. Letting it alone is undoubtedly safe; whether practising it be so, the church of *Rome* would do well to consider. They tell us indeed that they only beg the prayers of the saints in heaven, as we do those of good persons on earth. And were this true (as I shall prove it is not), we desire our fellow Christians on earth to pray for us, because we know they hear our desires: and surely it is reason enough not to ask those in heaven to do it, because we do not know they hear us, nor have the least cause to think they do. For scripture, which alone could tell us so, hath told us no such thing. But besides, if we can at all understand scripture, it hath expressly forbidden all applications to the inhabitants of the invisible world, excepting the Supreme Being. *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, says Moses, and him only shalt thou serve* *. *There is one God and one Mediator, says St. Paul, between God and men, the man Christ Jesus* †. Accordingly we find, that the angel which appeared to St. John in the *Revelation*, forbids any religious honour to be paid him, even when present. *See thou do it not: I am thy fellow-servant: worship God* ‡. And when some amongst the *Colossians* had affected unjustifiable practices of this kind, St. Paul censures them as being in a very dangerous error. *Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen* §. Yet does the church of *Rome* intrude so much farther as to pay undue worship to beings far below angels; not only to the saints in heaven, but to some who were so wicked on earth, that there is great reason to fear they are in hell; and to others that are mere fictions of their

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* Matt. iv. 10. † 1 Tim. ii. 5. ‡ Rev. xix. 10. xxii. 9. § Col. ii. 18.

own imaginations, and never were at all. For the sake of these, and through their merits, they desire in their public and authorised prayers, God's mercy, sometimes quite omitting to mention the merits of Christ, and sometimes joining his and theirs together. Farther than this, they directly pray to them, in the house of God, and in the same posture in which they pray to God; and that not only to intercede with him for them, but, in so many words, that they themselves *would bestow grace and mercy upon them, would forgive the guilt of their sins, deliver them from hell, and grant them a place in heaven.* What pretence is there now in Christianity for such things as these? and what doth this tend to, but making the ignorant, especially, think their favourite saint can do every thing for them, right or wrong? To him therefore they recommend themselves, not by a religious life, but by flattering addresses and costly presents: on his intercession they often depend, much more than on our blessed Saviour's; and, being secure, as they think, of these courtiers of heaven, pay little regard to the King of it. Thus is the intent of religion destroyed, and the Heathen multitude of deities brought silently back to Christianity. But above all, their worship of the virgin *Mary* is very remarkable. We honour her memory as a person whom *he that is mighty hath peculiarly magnified, and whom all generations shall call blessed* *; but address her in such terms as follow: *Empress of heaven; they queen of angels and men, through whom, after God, the whole earth liveth; mother of mercy; the fountain of grace and salvation; the only hope of sinners: Who ever trusted in thee, and was confounded? To thee I commit all my hope, and all my comfort; under thy defence is my refuge; make haste to help me in all things which I shall either do or think every moment of my life; loose the bonds of the guilty; enlighten the eyes of the blind; free us from all sin; and drive away from us all evil; grant us to escape eternal damnation; and cause the glory of paradise to be bestowed on us.* What authority or what excuse is there now for such expressions as these? And yet every one of them I have myself collected, partly out of their public offices, partly from others of their authorised and approved

* Luke i. 48, 49.

proved books of devotion. Formerly in their very mass-book they went yet farther; and *begged her, by virtue of her parental authority, to command of her son what they wanted.* But to this very day, in another office, they intimate the same thing, by exhorting her that *she would shew herself to be his mother.* And the better to make sure of her doing so, they apply to St. *Joachim*, who, they say, was her father, though indeed it is not certainly known at all who her father was, much less whether he was saint or sinner: However, they apply to St. *Joachim*, and tell him, that *as his daughter can possibly deny him nothing, it is in his power to do every thing he will for them.* This, you see, is being very artful in making interest; only it is more art than is necessary. For since we are both permitted and appointed to approach God through Christ directly, who, we are certain, doth both hear and will help us, we shall prejudice, instead of benefiting our cause, by making underhand applications to other persons, who perhaps never come to know of our petitions; and, if they do, are displeased at them; or, if they were not, can be in comparison of little use to us.

Yet to judge by the practice of the *Romish* church, who would not think that the whole New Testament were filled with precepts for the worship of the saints, especially the blessed virgin? Whereas, even in the *gospels*, she is but seldom and occasionally mentioned; our Saviour seeming on purpose to take less notice of her, as if he foresaw what advantages taking more would give to the extravagancies of after times. In the *Acts* she is just mentioned once. In the *epistles* and *Revelation* not at all. Yet these are not half the monstrous things that the *Romanists* are guilty of about her. They have invented a fable of her body being taken up into heaven, and appointed a solemn festival in honour of it. They have instituted a form of devotion called the *Rosary*, in which ten addresses are made to her for one to God; and successive Popes have granted large indulgences and blessings to all that shall say it. Then their private writers about her have gone incredible lengths. One of their cardinals, *Bonaventure*, by putting her name instead of God's, and some other necessary alterations, hath applied the whole book of *Psalms* to her. In the same manner he hath altered the *Te Deum*.

We praise thee, O Mary; we acknowledge thee to be the lady; and so in the other hymns of the church. Nay, he hath made a creed for her in imitation of St. Athanasius's. Whoever will be saved, it is necessary that he hold the true faith concerning Mary; which, except a man keep whole and undefiled, he shall perish everlastingly. Now, if their church do really disapprove these things, why do they never censure them? Why is this very man canonized for a saint, whilst we are condemned as heretics? For not content with thinking this kind of worship lawful, they pronounce accursed whoever shall think otherwise.

Another thing we differ in is this: They make pictures of God the Father, under the likeness of a venerable old man. They make images of Christ and of his saints after their own fancy. Before these images, and even that of his cross, they kneel down and prostrate themselves: to these they lift up their eyes, and in that posture pray. The least appearance of command, or even the allowance of such practices in scripture they pretend not; and yet against those who disallow them, they thunder out anathemas. Now, as to pictures of the Father Almighty, *whom no man either hath seen, or can see* *, all visible figures must represent him such as he is not; must lead the ignorant into low and mean ideas of him; and give those of better abilities, from a contempt of such representation, a contempt of the religion that uses them. Anciently the *Heathens* themselves had no images of God: and a very learned *Heathen* observes, that if they had never had any, their worship would have been the purer; for the inventors of these things, says he, lessened among men the reverence of the divine nature, and introduced errors concerning it †. The *Jews*, though the Old Testament figuratively expresses, in words, the power and attributes of God by parts of the human form, were yet most strictly forbidden all sensible representations of him under any form. *Take good heed unto yourselves, says Moses, for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the Lord spoke to you in Horeb; lest ye corrupt yourselves,*

* 1 Tim. vi. 16.

† Varro ap. S. Aug. de Civ. Dei. l. 4. c. 31. where he says they had none for 170 years. But *Tarquinius Priscus* introduced them. See *Tenison* on Idol. p. 59.

yourselfes, lest ye forget the covenant of the Lord your God, and make the similitude of any figure; for the Lord thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God *. Accordingly we find, that when they had made a golden image, though it was expressly designed in honour of that God who brought them out of *Egypt*, it was notwithstanding punished as idolatry. And far from allowing to Christians what was then forbidden the *Jews*, St. Paul most severely condemns it in the very Heathens, that *when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, but became vain in their imaginations, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God, into an image made like to corruptible man* †. Yet how near doth this approach to what the church of *Rome* doth now, in making pictures of God the Father! Our blessed Saviour indeed, having taken on him human nature, is capable to be represented in a human form. But, as all such representations must be imaginary ones, so they are useless ones too. The memorials of himself, which he hath appointed in the sacrament, we may be assured is sufficient to all good purposes; and these other memorials have always produced absurd and wicked superstitions. As for the images of the saints, it is sufficient to say, that there being no pretence for worshipping the saints themselves, there is yet less pretence for worshipping these representations of them. But here the church of *Rome* will say we wrong them: they do not worship images, but only Christ and his saints by these images. But indeed it is they who wrong themselves then. For not a few of their own writers ‡ frankly own they do worship images, and with the same degree of worship that they pay to the persons whose images they are. And for the cross particularly, in their public offices, they expressly declare themselves to adore it; and, in plain words, petition it in one of their hymns, *to give increase of grace to the righteous, and pardon to the guilty*. This, they say, is a poetical licence; and truly, in so serious a thing as worship, no small one.

* Deut. iv. 15—24.

† Rom. i. 21, 23.

‡ *Aquinas*, &c. See *Trapp*. Ch. of England defended, p. 219. They put in the *Index Exp.* those passages in marginal notes and indexes that say the contrary. See Instances, ib. 235. They are to be worshipped, says *Bellarmino*, *ita ut ipsæ terminent venerationem, ut in se considerantur & non solum ut vicem gerunt exemplaris*. *Bellarmin. de Imag.* l. ii. c. 24. ap. *Vitr. in Jf.* xlv. 20.

one. But farther: had they no regard to the image, but only to the person represented, why is an image in one place looked upon to have so much more power and virtue, than an image of the same person in another place? Why hath that of our lady of *Loretto*, for instance, so much more honour done it, than that of our lady any where else? We own the council of *Trent* does give a caution, that no divinity be ascribed to images, nor any trust put in them: And the Heathens gave the like caution often with respect to theirs: but this never hinders the scripture from condemning them as idolaters. And the reason is, that such cautions never are, or can be observed by the multitude. Place sensible objects before them to direct their worship to, and in those objects their worship will terminate. This the primitive Christians saw too plainly in the Heathens, ever to think of imitating them. Accordingly neither images nor pictures were allowed in churches for near 400 years. And when, after being more than once condemned, they came to be allowed, no honour was intended to be paid to them. On the contrary, when it began to be paid, which indeed was not long, it was severely censured, and particularly in the eighth century, by above 300 bishops, assembled in council at *Constantinople*. But about thirty years after, the second council of *Nice* (so all did councils agree), established it. Yet even this council held representations of *God* to be unlawful. And all the western countries, except *Italy*, under the Pope's immediate direction, continued to condemn the worship of all representations for some ages afterwards. But by degrees it first became general, and then so grossly scandalous, that the church of *Rome*, it seems, hath judged it the wisest way to leave the second commandment, which too plainly forbids these things, out of their smaller books of devotion, under the absurd pretence of its being only a part, I suppose an insignificant one, of the first; though, since they have been charged with this, they have thought fit in some of them, but not in all, to restore it again. And here let us quit the article of image-worship, with the Psalmist's remark upon it. *They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them. O Israel, trust thou in the Lord* *.

But

* Ps. cxv. 8, 9.

But there still remains another object of *Popish* worship, the sacramental bread and wine. For they have made it an article of faith, that the substance of these is, by the words of consecration, entirely changed into the substance of the living body and blood of Christ; which change therefore they call *transubstantiation*. Now, were this really the body of Christ, it is allowed we have no command to worship it under this disguise, and therefore commit no sin in letting such worship alone. But if it be really not so, they own themselves to pay that honour to a bit of bread, which belongs only to the eternal Son of God. And surely one should think it a question easily decided, whether a small wafer, which is the bread they use on these occasions, be the body of a man, and whether wine in a cup be blood. Almost every one of our senses will tell us it is not: And though, in some hasty or distant appearances of things, our senses may be deceived, yet if, where there is all possible opportunity of examining the matter, we cannot be sure of what our own eyes and our own feeling, our smelling and tasting, all inform us of, then we can be sure of nothing. It is only by such evidence that we know any thing in this world: it is by no other that we know we have a revelation from God, and that this sacrament is appointed in it. If therefore we are not to believe our senses, how are we to believe any thing at all? But indeed what they tell us in this case, is as contrary to all reason, as it is to all sense. That a human body, in its full dimensions, should be contained in the space of an inch or two, looks as like a contradiction as any thing well can do: that the substance of bread should not be in the sacrament, where they own all the properties of bread are; and that the substance of flesh should be there, and not one of the properties of it appear, is very monstrous; and that the very same body of Christ, which is now in heaven at the right hand of God, should at the same time be on earth in the right hand of the priest; and that there should be several thousands of those bodies upon earth, at many hundred of miles distance from one another, and yet all these be that very same one body also, this is such talk, that for sober persons, in their sober senses, to use it, and keep their countenance, is very strange. If one and one be two, then one body of Christ here, and one
body

body of Christ there, make two bodies of Christ, which they own he hath not. And if one body can be in more than one place at one time, we may all of us perhaps be now this very instant at *Rome* as well as here. A man may be at ever so many thousand miles distance from himself, and afterwards he may come and meet himself (as two of their pretended real bodies of Christ often do), and then pass by himself, and go away from himself, to the same distance he was at before; he may in one place be standing still, in another be carried along, and so be in motion and not in motion at the same time. Men may say such things as these if they will; and they may believe them if they can: but in order to it, well do they direct their poor people to profess, in their *English Manual of Prayers before Mass*, 1725, p. 409. *Herein I utterly renounce the judgment of my senses, and all human understanding.*

Here therefore we fix our foot: If these things be to every man living evidently absurd and impossible, then let nobody ever regard the most specious pretences of proving such doctrines, or the authority of a church that maintains them. It is no hard matter for an artful man, a little practised in disputing, so to confound a plain man upon almost any subject, that he shall not well know how to answer, though he sees himself to be right, and the other wrong. This is an art which the priests of the church of *Rome* are well versed in. Indeed the chief part of their learning is to puzzle themselves first, and as many others as they can afterwards. But always observe this rule: Stick to common sense against the world: and whenever a man would persuade you of any thing evidently contrary to that, never be moved by any tricks and fetches of sophistry, let him use ever so many. He will be for proving to you by round-about arguments, of which you are unqualified to judge, that his church is infallible, and therefore transubstantiation is true. Do you answer him by a much plainer argument, of which you are very well qualified to judge, that transubstantiation cannot possibly be true, and therefore his church is not infallible.

But they plead, with God all things are possible, and therefore this is so. Now we own that all things which are not impossible in themselves, are possible with him; but God himself

himself cannot do what in its own nature cannot be done. For instance, he cannot destroy his own being, he cannot cease to be just and good, because this hath a contradiction in it; and, for the same reason, he cannot do any thing else that hath a contradiction in it; for that would be doing a thing, and at the same time not doing it: to ascribe which to God, is not to magnify, but mock his power.

But they say further, that transubstantiation hath no more difficulty than the Trinity hath. But surely the difference is very visible. The doctrine of the Trinity indeed is a mystery; that is, the whole of the subject cannot be fully understood by us: but in transubstantiation there is no mystery at all. For the most evident falsehoods are just as clearly understood to be so as the most evident truths. In the Trinity there is nothing we see to be false, only we do not see the particular manner in which some things said concerning it are true; but in transubstantiation there are many things we see to be false, and which can in no manner be true. Let them shew us any contradiction in the doctrine of the Trinity, and we will believe it no longer. In the mean time, since we have shewn contradiction in transubstantiation, let *them* believe *that* no longer.

But they have scripture to plead for it. Now, if this were a doctrine of scripture, it would sooner prove scripture to be false, than scripture could prove it to be true; and therefore the Papists, by making such a monstrous absurdity an article of faith, have loaded their religion with a weight, which, did it belong to Christianity, were able to sink it. But, God be thanked, scripture is no more on their side than reason. We know indeed that our Saviour said, when he gave the sacrament, *This is my body*: but so at another time he said, *Verily verily I am the door of the sheep*: and at a third, *I am the vine*. And so have all mankind always called a representation of any thing by the name of what it represented. Why then is he not to be understood in the same figure here? How do we think the apostles understood him but as they were used to do in such cases? They who were so backward at comprehending difficult things, and so ready to ask questions about them, did they, without any surprise or any question, apprehend that our Saviour then took his own body in his

own hand, and gave that one body to each of his twelve apostles at the same time, and that each of them swallowed him down their throats, though he was all the while sitting at the table along with them? Such things are too ridiculous to be mentioned in a serious place; and yet these men force us to it, by gravely requiring us to believe them. The only considerable passage besides, that they plead, is in the sixth chapter of St. *John*; where many *Jews* having followed our Saviour, because he had fed them with the miracle of the loaves, he bids them *labour not for the meat which perisheth, but that which endureth unto everlasting life, which he would give them, who is the true bread from heaven*. Now, were this meant of the sacrament, and to be understood literally, we must conclude not bread turned into Christ's body, but his body turned into bread; which is quite the contrary to what they hold. But indeed the whole is only a figurative way of saying that the souls of men receive from the fruits of his death a much more valuable nourishment than their bodies receive from their daily food. Just as he elsewhere says *, *Whoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, it shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life*; which nobody ever understood literally: and just as Wisdom speaks herself in *Ecclus. xxiv. 21*. *They that eat me shall yet be hungry, and they that drink me shall yet be thirsty*; that is, they who have tasted the pleasures and benefits of virtue, will always desire a still greater experience of them. But the *Jews*, with their usual perverseness, cavilling at these words of our Saviour's, he goes on very strongly to assert the propriety of them, that *his flesh is meat indeed, and his blood drink indeed; that he who eateth the one, and drinketh the other, dwelleth in him, and liveth by him, but he that doth not, hath no life in him*. But now these words being spoken, you see, concerning the present time, *My flesh is meat indeed*, and so on, cannot principally relate to the sacrament, for there was yet no such thing, nor till a year or two after. Besides, it is not true that he, and he only, who eateth the sacrament, shall dwell in Christ, and live by him: for persons may possibly have no opportunity of receiving the sacrament, and yet be
very

* John iv. 14.

very good Christians, and too many receive it frequently, and yet are very bad Christians. The meaning therefore plainly is, that our Saviour's coming and suffering in the flesh, and shedding his blood for mankind, is the spiritual life of the world: that whoever imbibes the doctrine he taught in his life, and partakes by faith of the benefits he procured at his death, his soul is inwardly strengthened by them, and shall be finally preserved to a happy immortality. For in this spiritual and figurative sense he immediately directs his disciples to understand his words, when misunderstanding them in a gross and literal one had somewhat staggered them. *Doth this, says he, offend you? It is the Spirit that quickeneth: the flesh profiteth nothing. The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life.* His manner of expression had the same intent with that passage of St. Paul*, where he says, *the Israelites did all eat the same spiritual meat, and did all drink the same spiritual drink. For they drank of the spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.* The Papists themselves do not think from hence, that the Jews did eat and drink Christ literally: and Christians do it in the same manner they did, only with a clearer and more distinct faith. For in this spiritual sense Christ himself explains his words; we firmly believe *his body and blood to be verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful in the Lord's Supper*; that is, an union with him, to be not only represented, but really and effectually communicated to the worthy receiver. But as for any other sense, if we did, or could do so monstrous a thing, as literally to eat the flesh, and drink the blood of our dear Lord, it is not that which could do our souls any good, but only his grace accompanying this sacrament; which may as well accompany it without any change of the bread and wine, as it accompanies that of baptism, without any change of the water.

We see then that scripture by no means favours transubstantiation. It is indeed express against it. For St. Paul more than once tells us, that what we eat in the sacrament is *bread*, and as for what we drink, when our Saviour says, *this is my blood which is shed for you*, if he had meant literally, he

* 1 Cor. x. 3, 4.

had spoke falsely; for his blood was not shed till afterwards, and could not be drank then. Neither is it in a condition of being shed at present, and therefore cannot be drank now. But too much hath been said of this monstrous doctrine, to which the indiscretion of well-meaning writers gave the first occasion pretty early, whilst they affected to heighten the figurative expressions of scripture, by still more figurative ones of their own; little thinking, at the same time, that such an absurd meaning, as the Papists now plead for, could ever be ascribed to them; and plainly shewing, by innumerable proofs, that it is unjustly ascribed to them. But as ignorance and superstition increased, about 800 years after Christ this amazing notion began to be distinctly and explicitly entertained and asserted, which some had the good sense to oppose; some the weakness to receive, as a mystery that promoted the reverence of the sacrament; others the wickedness to support with zeal, as an artifice that increased the authority of the priest: for what could he not do, who, as they blasphemously express it, could make God? By degrees then this doctrine prevailed, till, in the 13th century, it was established as an article of faith. And when once the speculative error, of believing the consecrated bread and wine to be literally the body and blood of Christ obtained, the practical one of worshipping them as such quickly followed. For though a decent respect was always paid to the sacrament, yet a direct adoration to the elements was never paid, till the dark and superstitious ages above-mentioned introduced so senseless an idolatry, to the infinite scandal of religion. May God, who mercifully winked at the times of Heathen ignorance, overlook this less excusable folly of Christianity, and *forgive them, for they know not what they do*. But let us all remember, that our case will be much worse than theirs, if, after the light hath so clearly shone upon us, we return to darkness again: if, as the apostle expresses it, *we change the truth of God into a lie, and worship the creature instead of the Creator, who is blessed for evermore* *. *Amen.*

* Rom. i. 25.

S E R M O N C.

THE SACRED SCRIPTURES THE ONLY INFALLIBLE RULE OF
FAITH AND PRACTICE.

I PET. V. 12.

—*Exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God
wherein ye stand.*

HAVING proposed from these words, first, to shew what is the rule of Christian faith and practice; and, secondly, to examine by this rule the chief differences between the church of *Rome* and ours: the former head I have finished, and made some progress in the latter. The honour paid by them to saints and images, the doctrine of transubstantiation, and the worship built upon it of the sacramental bread and wine, have been considered: and now I proceed to another peculiarity of theirs, with respect to the sacrament, withholding the cup from the laity. That our Saviour administered the holy eucharist, in both kinds, they acknowledge; nay, that he expressly commanded those, to whom he administered it, that they should *all drink of that cup*. What therefore he commands all to do, why do they forbid all but the priest to do? Why, the apostles, they say, were commanded to take the cup as well as the bread, because they were clergy: but the church of *Rome* forbids even the clergy, excepting those who officiate, to take it. Besides, if the command of receiving the *cup* relates only to the clergy, that of receiving the *bread* too must relate only to the clergy; for there is no manner of distinction made in the gospel. Yet they own the laity are obliged, by our Saviour's command, to receive the bread, and therefore they are obliged, by the same command, to receive the cup; which that they did accordingly, the eleventh chapter

ter of the first epistle to the *Corinthians* makes as plain as words can make any thing. Not to say further, that if the sixth of St. *John* relate immediately to the sacrament, as they are sometimes very positive it doth, the fifty-third verse of that chapter expressly declares, that, unless we *drink the blood of the Son of Man*, as well as *eat his flesh*, we have no life in us.

But they tell us, our Saviour himself, after his resurrection, administered the sacrament in one kind only. For St. *Luke* says, that sitting down to eat with the two disciples at *Emmaus*, *He took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them*; and, upon their knowing him, *vanished out of their sight* *. Now it happens, that this was not administering the sacrament at all, but doing just the same thing, which the evangelists, in just the same words, tell us he did, when he fed the multitudes with the loaves and fishes, and indeed at every meal he eat. For the *Jews*, in the beginning of every meal of theirs, use the very same custom to this day †. But they further plead, that however that be, at least when in the *Acts* of the Apostles it is said, the *disciples met together to break bread on the first day of the week* ‡, this must be the sacrament, and the cup is not once mentioned there as given. We answer, it is not certain that even this was the sacrament; and supposing it was, as, in scripture-language, common feasts are expressed by the single phrase of eating bread, which yet surely does not prove that the guests drank nothing, so neither is it proved by a religious feast being expressed in the same manner. And besides, if there is no mention there of the laity's receiving the cup, there is none of the priest's receiving it neither; yet this they think absolutely necessary: and if one may be taken for granted, without being mentioned, the other may. Nor should it be forgotten on this occasion, that as the phrase of eating sometimes comprehends the whole of this action, so doth that of drinking: *we have all been made to drink into one Spirit*, says the apostle §; who hence proves the unity of all Christians, and therefore certainly thought it was the right of all Christians ||. But they plead

* Luke xxiv. 30, 31. † *Buxtorf. Synag. Jud. c. 12.* ‡ *Acts xx. 7.*

§ 1 Cor. xii. 13.

|| *Claret, Vol. i. Sermon. x. p. 265.*

plead farther, that the laity, by receiving the body of Christ, receive his blood also, for the blood is contained in the body. But here they quite forget, that our Saviour hath appointed this sacrament to be received for a memorial of his blood's being shed out of his body, of which, they who receive not the cup, do not make the memorial which he commanded, when he said, *Drink ye all of this*. Still they insist, that there being no peculiar virtue or benefit annexed to this part of the sacrament that they with-hold, which does not belong to the other, it is no manner of loss to the laity to omit it. Now does not the same reason prove equally that the clergy may omit it too? But besides, what treatment of our blessed Lord is this, when he hath appointed all Christians to perform a solemn act of religion, consisting of two parts, both with equal strictness enjoined, for the church of *Rome* to say that one of them the far greatest part of Christians shall not perform, for it is full as well let alone; nay, better indeed, if we believe them; for the cup, they tell us, may be drank of immoderately, may be spilled, many dreadful inconveniences may happen from trusting it with the laity? Now, it is strange our Saviour should not be wise enough to foresee these inconveniences; it is strange we should not experience them neither; and it adds to the wonder not a little, that the whole church of Christ, for 1200 years, should not be able to find them out any more than we. For in all that time, the cup was constantly given to the laity in their public communions, though there are some instances, yet neither many, nor early ones, in which the bread alone was carried to private houses. And when some of the laity, for absurd reasons, refused to take the cup, no less than three Popes condemned them. But superstitious imaginations gradually increasing amongst Christians, a custom arose first of giving the bread, dipped in wine, instead of both separate; and at last in the 15th century, and council of *Constance*, the same which decreed so honestly, that promises made to the prejudice of the catholic faith ought not to be kept*, decreed also very modestly, that notwithstanding (for so they express it) our Saviour administered both kinds, one only shall be administered for the future to the laity.

And

* See *Courayer's Council of Trent*, Vol. I. p. 595.

And now it is made an article of their creed, that the whole sacrament is given by giving this part: so that whoever shall say both are necessary (which, if it be not a truth, one should think could not be a heresy), is by the council of *Trent* pronounced accursed.

Another difference between the church of *Rome* and ours, with respect to the sacrament, is this. They hold that as often as it is celebrated, Christ is truly and properly offered up a sacrifice for our sins. Now we acknowledge, that every act of obedience, and of worship more especially, may, agreeably to the language of scripture, be spoken of as a sacrifice to our Maker: that his creatures of bread and wine, when appropriated to this solemn act of religion, are so far offerings to God; and that this whole act, being a memorial and representation of the sacrifice of Christ, may fitly enough be called by the same name with what it commemorates and represents: so that in this sense Christians have an altar and an offering upon it. But that, instead of a representative sacrifice of praise, it should be a real sacrifice of atonement, in which Christ's body, literally speaking, is every day offered up anew, of this we can see neither proof nor possibility. For not only it supposes transubstantiation to be true, which hath been proved to be false, but it is absolutely inconsistent with the whole chapters of the epistle to the *Hebrews*; the ninth and tenth, which throughout inculcate that *Christ was not to be offered up often, for then must he often have suffered; but that he appeared once to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself; was once offered to bear the sins of many; and by this one offering hath for ever perfected them that are sanctified.* If therefore our doctrine be heretical in this point, *St. Paul's* is so too; not to speak of the primitive Christians, who, though they often called this ordinance a sacrifice, yet, by calling it an unbloody one, shew they did not think the blood of Christ was literally offered up in it; and by frequently saying they had indeed no sacrifices, prove themselves to look on this only as a figurative one.

But now, from this notion of a daily atonement thus made, I shall proceed to their other doctrines concerning the forgiveness of sins. And here they hold, that a particular absolution from a priest is necessary, if it can be had, for the pardon of every

every mortal sin, *i. e.* every sin by which any person, without repentance, forfeits his title to heaven; and that a particular confession of every material circumstance of every such sin, is necessary for absolution. And the practice of these things they apprehend to give their church an unspeakable advantage over ours.

The necessity of such absolution they plead for from our Saviour's words to his apostles: *Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven* *. *Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained* †. Now certainly these words did not put it in the power of the apostles themselves, to pardon, or refuse to pardon, whom they pleased, right or wrong. They could use the keys of the kingdom of heaven no further than he saw fit, *who openeth, and no man shutteth; who shutteth, and no man openeth* ‡. Yet the apostles had great powers by virtue of these words, which we have not: the power of discerning by the Spirit, in many cases at least, and therefore of declaring who were penitent and pardoned, who otherwise: the power of inflicting and continuing miraculous punishments on wicked persons, which is *binding and retaining* their sin and of removing such punishments, which is *loosing and remitting* them. But these things the *Romish* clergy can no more claim than we. What then besides can there be conveyed by these words of our Lord? A power of preaching that gospel, according to the terms of which alone the sins of men shall be forgiven or punished; a power of admitting persons into a state of forgiveness by baptism; of administering to them the word of God and the holy sacrament, as means of grace; of denouncing his wrath against all sinners; interceding with him for all penitents; and pronouncing, in his name, that he pardons and absolves them. These things, we trust, are done much more faithfully by us than them. There is indeed another power, of exercising spiritual discipline, for the honour of the church, and the sake of example, to distinguish, so far as men are able, between the good, by admitting them to communion with us, and the bad, by excluding them from

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it.

* Matt. xviii. 18.

† John xx. 23.

‡ Rev. iii. 7.

it. In this we acknowledge that we are deficient ; but they are worse : for they have utterly perverted it from a public institution of general use and influence, to a secret transaction between a sinner and his confessor, in which not only such absolution is made necessary, as the scripture hath no where required, but such confession insisted on as is no way needful to it. Not needful from any command of God : for the chief and almost only text they plead for that purpose, *Confess your faults one to another* *, no more obliges the people, in all cases, to reveal the particulars of their sins to the priest, than the priest to reveal the particulars of his to the people. Nor is it needful from the nature of the thing : for it is not knowing a person's sins that can qualify the priest to give him absolution, but knowing he hath repented of them ; which is just as possible to be known without a particular confession as with it.

Still, in many cases, acknowledging the errors of our lives, and opening the state of our souls to the ministers of God's word, for their opinion, their advice, and their prayers, may be extremely useful, sometimes necessary. And whenever persons think it so, we are ready both to hear them with the utmost secrecy, and to assist them with our best care ; to direct them how they may be forgiven, if we think they are not ; to pronounce them forgiven, if we think they are : only we must beg them to remember, that none but God can pardon sins as to their consequences in another world. Men indeed may take off from sinners the censures of the church, if they have incurred them ; but as to any thing farther, all we can do is either to pray to God that he would forgive them (which was the only form of absolution till the eleventh century at least), or else to declare that he hath done so. And let such a declaration express ever so positively that either God or the priest absolves them, it is a fatal error to build hopes on this, with respect to another life, any further than conditionally, that if their repentance be sufficient, their forgiveness is certain. But whether it be sufficient or no, the priests of our church can give their judgment, and those of the church of *Rome* can possibly do no more ; for they must own themselves to be as fallible as we are.

But

* James v. 16.

But as neither reason nor scripture makes confession and absolution of this kind necessary, so neither did the primitive church hold it to be so. Public confession indeed they required in cases of public scandal; but for private confession in all cases, it was never thought of as a command of God for 900 years after Christ, nor determined to be such till after 1200, when the same council of *Lateran* decreed it, which decreed also the deposing of such princes as would not extirpate heresy: and yet it is amazing what stress they now lay upon it. No repentance, they tell us, will avail, if it be neglected; and almost any will do, if it be observed. For let a dying sinner have only what they call attrition, such a sorrow as arises merely from the fear of being punished, without the least degree of dislike to sin or love to God, this sorrow, though not sufficient without absolution, yet with it is. So that if a person, who hath disregarded God all his life, can but be made afraid of him at his death, the priest shall deliver him from hell, and secure heaven to him, by a word speaking. Some lesser punishments indeed he doth remain subject to first; as to which, however, there are ways of making matters as easy as can well be wished: but in order to understand them, another head of *Papish* doctrine must be explained.

Our Saviour, they tell us, having procured for repenting sinners the forgiveness only of the eternal punishment due to their sins, there remains a temporal punishment due to them still, which, if it be not in this life, either inflicted by worldly sufferings, or satisfied for by good works and penances, must be undergone after death, in the pains of a place called *Purgatory*; which pains may, however, be mitigated and shortened, partly by offering up prayers for such persons, and partly by granting indulgencies to them: and these things also we are heretics for not believing. Yet, for the necessity of our believing these doctrines, they pretend no scripture-proof, and they have no proof for so much as the truth of them. Heaven and hell we read of perpetually in the bible, but purgatory we never meet with; though surely, if there be such a place, Christ and his apostles would not have concealed it from us. St. Paul indeed mentions *a fire that tries every man's works, and persons that shall be saved, yet so as by fire* *.

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But

* 1 Cor. iii. 13, 15.

But what is he there speaking of? He had been laying amongst them, he says, the foundation of religion, the acknowledgment of Jesus Christ. *On this*, says he, *another man hath built: but let every man take heed how he buildeth; what he teaches for Christian doctrine; for the day shall declare it, and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is: either the day of the fiery trial of persecution, or rather the final judgment of God, whose day shall burn like an oven**, this shall try every man's work, search it as thoroughly as fire does things that are put into it; then, *if any man's work which he hath built abide*, if the doctrines he hath taught bear the test, *he shall receive a reward*; but, *if his work be burnt*, if, preserving the fundamentals of Christianity, he hath built errors on them, *he shall suffer loss*; the pains he hath taken shall be of no benefit, and though he may be saved himself, it shall be like one that escapes through the fire, with great danger and difficulty. For so St. Jude speaks: *Some save with fear, pulling them out of the fire†*: and the prophet Amos, *Ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning‡*. This passage therefore relates not to punishing, in purgatory, the persons of some men, before the day of judgment, but to trying the works of all men at the day of judgment; and, far from patronising the church of Rome, gives them indeed an awful warning not to build on the foundation of Christianity hay and stubble, such useless trash as this, and many other of their doctrines, which that great day of the Lord will shew to have no solidity in them; but *their work shall be burnt up, themselves suffer loss, and at best be saved only so as by fire*. Their other texts for purgatory are, if possible, less to the purpose than this: that *blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven, either in this life or that to come§*; which is only saying, it shall never be forgiven, but punished both here and hereafter: that *he who agrees not with his adversary in the way, shall be cast by the judge into prison, and not come out till he hath paid the uttermost farthing||*; which perhaps is only saying, that whoever doth not make up a difference with his neighbour before trial, must expect no favour after: Or, if God be the judge meant,

* Mal. iv. 1.

† Jude, ver. 23.

‡ Amos iv. 11.

§ Matt. xii. 32.

|| Matt. v. 25, 26.

meant, the sense will be, that the person condemned shall never come out of prison, because he can never *pay the uttermost farthing*. For uncharitableness unrepented of, which is the crime here mentioned, the Papists themselves own, sends men not to purgatory, but to hell. As for their notion, that our Saviour hath not procured forgiveness of the temporal punishment of sin, it is certain from scripture, that he hath procured the forgiveness of every thing that can properly be called punishment; for *his blood cleanseth us from all sin**, and therefore no purgatory is needful. And *there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus†*, and consequently no such place to be condemned to. Correction indeed there is, but this correction is the work, not of an offended judge, but a merciful Father: and as he, by these and many other means, endeavours to amend us, so we should use all proper means to amend ourselves: but such penances as tend only to give pain, are not proper means, even in this life, which is our only time of amendment; much less will any such be inflicted on good men in the other, when they will come too late for any valuable purpose. *Blessed*, says the angel, *are the dead that die in the Lord, from henceforth*, from the hour of their death, *for they rest from their labours ‡*. But miserable, says the church of Rome, are many of the dead that die in the Lord, for a long time after, for they rest not from their labours, but labour under most grievous sufferings. But indeed even their own apocryphal scriptures might have taught them better than this. *The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them §*. Nor is their plea from antiquity better than that from scripture. For though many had adopted strange notions of these things, out of Heathen fable and philosophy, into the Christian religion, yet purgatory, in the present Popish sense, was not heard of for 400 years after Christ; nor universally received, even in the western churches, for 1000 years; nor almost in any other church, than that of Rome, to this day. But supposing there were such a place, how do they know concerning any particular person that he ever comes into it, or how long he stays in it? And if not, what is it but *offering the sacrifice of fools ||*,
to

* 1 John i. 7.

† Rom. viii. 1.

‡ Rev. xvi. 13.

§ Wisd. iii. 1.

|| Eccles. v. 1.

to make thousands of prayers for one who may be quite out of the reach of them, either in heaven, or perhaps in hell? Though indeed, by praying for the very wickedest of men, as only in purgatory, they strongly tempt other wicked men to conclude, that none of their communion ever go to hell. And thus is this invention at once so great a terror to good persons, and so great a comfort to bad ones, that one cannot help applying to it the prophet's words: *With lies ye have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad: and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life* *. But were they to pray, not for particular persons, as they do, but only in general for all that are there, where is the command, where is even the permission for it? Our brethren on earth we pray for, because the time of their trial is not yet over; but the state of the dead is fixed, and they shall receive, every man, not according to our prayers, but their own past works. Purgatory, they tell us, is that prison whence men shall not come out *till they have paid the last farthing*: and what room is there then for our prayers for them there? We own indeed some sort of prayers for the dead were used by the church (though without any warrant for them that appears) very early, within 200 years after Christ. But then originally these were made, not for souls in purgatory, for whom the Papists pray, but for saints in *Paradise*, for whom they do not pray; for all righteous persons deceased, prophets, apostles, martyrs, even for the blessed virgin herself: and hence it appears by the way, that they did not pray to these since they prayed for them. And the subject-matter of their prayers was, that God would grant them his promised mercy in the day of judgment, and speedily complete their happiness in body and soul. In process of time, it must be owned, men fell into a variety of groundless suppositions, concerning the state of Christians between death and the resurrection; and upon these suppositions they formed their prayers, which many persons went so far as to imagine could benefit even sinners in hell. But as all these suppositions, for a long time, were different from, and inconsistent with, the *Romish* notions of

* Ezek. xiii. 22.

of purgatory, so the prayers which the ancients used for the dead, even were they of authority (which they are not, for nothing is so but what appears to come from God), would condemn, and not justify those prayers which the Papists use.

Another Popish method of relieving sinners is by indulgences. Originally this word meant a very right thing, the mitigation of the severity or length of ecclesiastical censures towards such, as, by an exemplary repentance, had deserved it. Nor was any other sort of indulgences known for at least 600 years, perhaps much longer. But the present notion of the church of *Rome* about them (though in their disputes with us they would fain disguise it if they could), is this: Many of the saints, it seems, having not only done enough to merit immediate entrance into heaven, but more than was necessary for that purpose; this overplus of their goodness, called usually works of supererogation, joined with the infinite merits of Christ, makes a treasure of inestimable value, which the church hath the disposal of, and the Pope, as head of the church, applies towards the remission of their sins, who either fulfil in their lifetime certain conditions appointed by him, or whose friends will fulfil them after their deaths. Now we, on the contrary, have learnt from scripture, that in many things the best of us all offend; that, were our obedience perfect, it were no more than our duty; and that to the grace of God, not to the merit of our works, the salvation of our souls is owing. In some respects indeed, in useless mortifications and observances of no value, we acknowledge many saints of their church have done much more than God requires, much more than he approves or will reward. But even had they done more really good things than they were obliged to do, this might indeed increase their own happiness in another world: but what pretence is there for affirming, that instead of that it shall be transferred away to the benefit of others, and those others just whomsoever the Pope shall please? This sure is very hard. But after all, what is the benefit conferred by these indulgences? If it be only deliverance, either wholly or in part, from purgatory, there is no such place to be delivered from; and that it is from hell, they dare not say indeed, but they do every thing that can make the ignorant think it. Why else are Christ's merits mentioned as one ground of indulgences?

dulgences? For he hath not merited, they tell us, deliverance from temporary punishments, as purgatory is, but from eternal ones only. Why also do their indulgences declare themselves to bestow the most full remission and forgiveness of all sins, if they mean only the smallest part of forgiveness? These things are too plainly calculated to deceive poor wretches into a fatal belief, that, by such methods, wickedness here may become consistent with happiness hereafter. Repentance indeed is, in words, made one condition of obtaining these indulgences; but this is easily explained away, or overlooked amongst the others joined with it, of saying so many prayers, going to so many processions, and paying so much money. Nay, if their own historians are to be credited, the inhabitants of whole cities at once, upon visiting certain churches, and paying a certain sum, have, before now, been absolved of all their sins by the Pope, with these very words added, *even though they had not been contrite for them, nor confessed them*. But as the reformation was first brought on by the enormities of indulgences, so, since the reformation, they have in many places, both in this and other respects, greatly moderated their practices, though they have never effectually disclaimed their principles. And indeed, as angry as they are with that happy event, they have great reason to be thankful for it, on account of several changes for the better which it has produced amongst them, especially where part of any country have been Protestants: for elsewhere all their abuses are kept up. And for one proof of it, I have now in my custody a plenary indulgence, granted for a small piece of gold at *Rome* this very year * to an absolute stranger, for himself, for his kindred to the third degree, and to thirty persons more, for whose names a proper blank is left in the instrument. So that had not the reformation given them some check, God knows whether, by this time, Christianity had been discoverable under the changes and disguises which the prevailing part of them would have deformed it with. Consider but to what lengths matters had already gone, in this one article of the remission of sins. The necessity of confession put the secrets of every man's heart and life into the
breast

breast of the priest ; and the power of admitting into heaven, or excluding from it, forced the bigotted sinner to do whatever should be enjoined him. In how monstrous a manner this power was used, the histories of all nations dreadfully shew. Add then to preserve it from growing quite intolerable, an artifice was added that made it still more fatal. It is too well known that mankind will do any thing rather than their duty, and part with any thing sooner than their vices. On the terms therefore of submitting in other points, they were made easy in this favourite one. The strictest rules of life indeed were laid down for such as thought themselves bound to be strict ; but for those who desired to be otherwise, superstitious observances were allowed to take place of real duties ; idle penances to stand instead of true repentance and reformation : without a zeal for such follies as these, the best man was reckoned to have but small hope of future happiness ; and with a zeal for the notions and interests of holy church, the worst man was easily secured from future misery. Absolution, if he were but ever so little sorry for having been a sinner, would set him clear at once from hell ; and, if he had but either time to perform a few silly devotions and mortifications while he lived, or money to purchase a good many prayers for him when he died, his confinement in purgatory must soon be over : and thus was the necessity of a holy life quite taken away, and the gospel of Christ altogether made void. Far be it from us of this church to affright you with such vain terrors, or deceive you with such vain hopes. On the contrary, be assured that were all the priests on earth to refuse absolving a true penitent, it would never hurt him ; and were they all to join in absolving a man, that hath not repented as the gospel requires, it would do him no good. Be assured that no equivalent in the world will be accepted instead of true inward piety, nor all the good works of all the saints in heaven compensate, in the least degree, for the want of good works in any one man on earth. Never be moved then by the most confident pretences of this kind, but know, for a certainty, that whoever flies for refuge from his sins to those who will flatter him with such wretched expedients as these, instead of mending his condition, by trusting to them, only makes it worse and more desperate than it was

before. The words of God, in the case of the Israelites, are just as applicable in this : *Because ye have said, we have made a covenant with death, and with hell we are at agreement, when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us, for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves : Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand : when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then shall ye be trodden down by it. Judgment will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet ; and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place **.

Ye therefore, beloved, to conclude with the words of St. Peter, seeing ye know these things, beware, lest being led away with the error of the wicked, ye fall from your own stedfastness : But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ †. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.

* *Is.* xxviii. 15, 17, 18.

† *2 Pet.* iii. 17, 18.

S E R M O N C I.

THE SACRED SCRIPTURES THE ONLY INFALLIBLE RULE OF
FAITH AND PRACTICE.

I PET. V. 12.

—*Exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God
wherein ye stand.*

AFTER fixing the rule of Christian faith and practice, I proceeded to compare with this rule the chief things which distinguish the church of *Rome* from ours. Great numbers of these I have already considered, and shall now, for your fuller satisfaction, go on to some others.

Several of their notions concerning the pardon of sin I have mentioned and confuted ; but there still remains one more to be spoken of ; their custom, when a sick person is near death, of anointing his eyes, and ears, and nostrils, and mouth, and hands, sometimes also his feet and reins, with oil consecrated by the bishop, and praying, that in virtue of that anointing, the sins which he hath committed, by the several organs of his body, may be forgiven him. This they call *Extreme Unction*, or the sacrament of dying persons ; and teach, that, besides forgiveness of sins, it gives composure and strength of mind to go through the agonies of death. All this they build wholly on the following passage of *St. James*. *Is any sick among you ? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up ; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him* *. But a little consideration will shew, that what

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St.

* James v. 14, 15.

St. *James* appoints is very different from what the church of *Rome* does. In those days miraculous gifts were common; that of healing diseases in particular: and the persons who had these gifts were usually the elders of the churches, whom the apostle here directs to be sent for. And as miracles, in condescension to the genius of the *Jewish* people, to whom this epistle is directed, were accompanied, for the most part, with some outward act of ceremony by the performer of them (a practice which our Saviour himself often complied with), so the ceremony used in healing the sick by miracle, viz. anointing them with oil, was one to which the *Jews* had been accustomed; oil being a thing of which much use was made in the eastern countries, on many occasions*. Accordingly we read, that when our Saviour sent out his disciples with a power from heaven to cure diseases, though he prescribed to them no particular form for that purpose, yet they adopted this; *they anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them*†. Now what the evangelist tells us they did, is evidently the very thing which St. *James* directs the elders of the church to do. And therefore, since the anointing mentioned in the gospel was only a mere circumstance used in miraculous cures, that also mentioned in the epistles can be nothing more. Accordingly we find St. *James* neither appoints any consecration of the oil, nor ascribes any efficacy to it, as the Papists do, but says, *the prayer of faith shall save the sick*. Now, if this means only prayer offered up in a general faith of God's providence, we use it for the sick as well as they, and may hope for the same good effect from it. But faith, in many places of scripture, signifies that supernatural persuasion and feeling of a power to work miracles, which in those days was frequent. Thus St. *Paul* says, *though I had all faith, so that I could remove mountains*‡, &c. And therefore,

* See *Wheatley* on the Office for the Sick. And *Grotius*, on *Mark* vi. 13. says the *Jews* used it when they prayed for the sick, to express their hope of obtaining from God, in their behalf, that joy and gladness which oil signifies. *Preservative against Popery*, Tit. vii. c. ii. § 4. p. 62.

† *Mark* vi. 13. The council of *Trent* had at first said that extreme unction was instituted in this place, but afterwards changed that word for *insinuated*. *F. Paul*. in *Preserv.* p. 64.

‡ *1 Cor.* xiii. 2. See also *Matt.* xvii. 20. *John* xiv. 12, 13.

fore, *the prayer of faith*, since it is so absolutely promised here that it *shall save the sick*, probably means, a prayer proceeding from this extraordinary persuasion and impulse; such a one as, in the next verse, we translate *an effectual fervent prayer*, but should translate an *inwrought* or *inspired prayer*. And therefore unless, in the church of *Rome*, the priest, as often as he administers extreme unction, acts and prays by immediate inspiration, his prayers are not of the sort *St. James* speaks of, nor are they directed to the same end. The benefit which he promises from the prayers that he appoints, is the recovery of health; *The prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up*: whereas they of the church of *Rome* never use this ceremony with any hope of recovery, nor indeed, unless they happen to mistake, till the person is quite past recovery. And, for this reason again, his anointing and theirs are quite different things. For though *St. James* does add, *And if he hath committed sins, they shall be forgiven him*, yet the very doubt, implied in the word *if*, shews he is not speaking of a sacrament instituted purposely for the remission of sins, as the church of *Rome* make their unction to be. And indeed this relates to the very same thing with his former words. For, as bodily sickness and infirmity was frequently a punishment for sin (whence, to mention no other proofs, *St. Paul* tells the *Corinthians**, *For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep*), so the very form of miraculously healing a person of these infirmities, used by our Saviour, is, *Son, thy sins be forgiven thee*†; that is, the illness inflicted on thee for thy sins is removed. Since therefore *St. James* promises forgiveness of sins in just a like case, we are certainly to understand him in just the like sense, *viz.* that if the sickness of any person prayed for were the punishment of any sin, that punishment should be remitted, and his health restored. Now this forgiveness of the temporal punishment of some particular sins, which is what *St. James* promises, the church of *Rome* does not promise from this ceremony; and the forgiveness of the future punishment of all those sins, that the sick person hath ever committed by his bodily organs, which *St. James* does not promise,

* 1 Cor. ix. 30.

† Matt. ix. 2. See also John v. 14.

promise, they do : though indeed it is a little hard to conceive, when all a man's sins have been already forgiven (as they say they are, by the priest's absolution), how any of them should want to be forgiven again, perhaps by extreme unction, the moment after. But the truth is, they themselves lay not near so much stress on this ceremony's procuring pardon of sin, as its procuring composure of mind against the terrors of death. Now most evidently this expectation St. *James* hath not said one word to countenance : so that his precept, which seems, at first sight, to be some ground for their practice, and is the only ground they have, relates indeed to a quite different thing, as one of their cardinals, *Cajetan* *, acknowledges : though the council of *Trent*, sess. 14. hath thought proper since to curse all that shall say it. The anointing prescribed by St. *James* therefore, being entirely of a miraculous nature, was in all reason to cease when miracles were no more. And accordingly the primitive Christians, though they speak more than once of anointing with oil in miraculous cures, yet, in common cases, never mention it as a custom, much less as one appointed in scripture, for the first 600 years †. After that indeed, they came to use it upon all sick persons in the beginning of sickness, for a means of recovery, as the *Greek* church doth yet ; till, finding it of little benefit in that way, the church of *Rome*, about the 12th century, began to use it in the extremity of sickness, as a sacrament of preparation for death ; which, if it were in reality, they are surely much to blame for not giving it under the apprehensions of an approaching violent death ; for instance, before a malefactor is executed, where it cannot but be as needful as in the fears of a natural one. Upon the whole, you see our laying aside a ceremony which hath long been useless, and, by leading persons into superstitious fancies, might be hurtful, can be no manner of loss, whilst every thing that continues truly valuable in St. *James's* direction is preserved in our office for visiting the sick ; concerning which, I shall only add, that it is much to be wished men would so live

* *Preservative*, Tit. vii. c. 2. § 2. p. 60.

† Concerning a passage of *Innocent I.* in the beginning of the 5th century. See *Preserv.* p. 75.

live in the time of their health, as to need the least spiritual assistance that is possible, in the time of their sickness; and that what they do need, they would all apply for early, when it might be of great benefit to them, and not content themselves with calling in the minister at last for mere form's sake, when he can do them little good, or none.

Another point in which we differ from the church of *Rome* is, that all their public prayers are in the *Latin* tongue, ours in our own. This sure at least is no heresy, that, when we pray to God, we all know what we say. Our practice justifies itself: but how is theirs justified? Reason and common sense plainly condemn it. Antiquity is no less against them; for every Christian church originally had their own service in their own tongue. That of the western world was in *Latin*, only because *Latin* was their common language: and therefore it should have been no longer in *Latin*, when that ceased to be their common language. And for scripture, read but the 14th chapter of 1 *Corinthians*, and see what St. *Paul* would have judged of this *Romish* practice. Even when there was a miraculous gift of tongues in the church, and men prayed or prophesied, in strange languages, by inspiration, even then he requires such persons to keep silence, unless another were ready to interpret publicly what they spoke: for, says he, *Brethren, except ye utter words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air. If I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a Barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a Barbarian unto me. How shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen, at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all: yet in the church, I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue.* It immediately follows, and very fitly to the present purpose: *Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.* For never sure was greater *childishness*, than to be satisfied with the mere outward shew of prayers to God, perhaps without understanding one word of them, which is not praying at all; nor greater *malice*, that is, more wicked and cruel cunning, than to keep the
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poor people in this darkness, and plead for it with such unfair pretences as they do. Some of them tell us very gravely, that *Latin*, far from being an unknown tongue, is the best known of any in *Europe*. And if it were, yet if this best known tongue is notwithstanding unknown to ninety-nine persons in a hundred, why must they all be confined to it, and not have each their own prayers in their own tongue? Why, that variety would be very inconvenient, they say, to travellers. But whose convenience is most to be consulted? That of whole nations, or of a few persons that come amongst them occasionally? But vulgar tongues, they say, are perpetually changing, and expressions growing improper and unintelligible. I answer, our having our bible and prayer-book in the vulgar tongue, undoubtedly prevents its changing near so fast as it would otherwise. But when it does change, let them, where it is needful, be changed to it. For which is worse, to take this little trouble of altering a few words and phrases once in a hundred years, or to let people go on for ages together, with prayers and lessons, of which they understand not one word? But they allege farther, that some of their prayers, indeed a great part of the mass, it would be useless to have said in their own language; for the priest is ordered to speak it so low, that it cannot be heard; as if one fault would excuse another, instead of making it greater. But many of their prayers, they say, may be understood; for though spoken in *Latin*, there are printed translations of them in *English*. But still great part of them is not translated, unless it be by some very modern indulgence*; and that which is, nothing but our making them ashamed of themselves hath forced them to of late, in these parts of the world, against their will. For we know that when, within this last century, some well-meaning bishops of their own church in *France*, had published the mass in the vulgar tongue, for the people's use, the then Pope declared them sons of perdition to all the world, and condemned what they had done, as if it were the overthrow

* The *English* translator of the Order and Canon of the Mass, hath omitted many of the ceremonies, particularly above twenty crosses out of less than thirty. *Tenison* on Idol. p. 5.

overthrow of religion *. So that, for aught we know, the same liberty taken here may fall under the same condemnation, when a proper time comes. Or were the contrary ever so certain, still putting their prayers into *English* for the people, only shews that they ought to be spoken in *English* by the priest: for this round-about way is evidently a most absurd one; that he should be praying in one language, and they following him by guess, as well as they can, in another. Besides, multitudes of their poor people have never heard of these translations, or at least have them not: multitudes more are unable to read them: and all these must be left quite in the dark. But we are told, they have a good intention in general: they reverence what they do not understand, and this is sufficient. Now, for the purposes of spiritual dominion, this may be sufficient: and such devotions, as many of theirs are, will, we own, be more revered for not being understood: but for the edification of the people, it is far from being sufficient, to have good intentions in general, and no meaning in particular: to pray to God for they know not what; and hear lessons read, which they can learn nothing from.

Another thing akin to the former, in which we differ from the church of *Rome*, is, that we allow and exhort all persons to read the holy scriptures diligently. They, on the contrary, have expressly decreed, that, since the promiscuous allowance of bibles in the vulgar tongue does more harm than good (these are the very words of the index published in consequence of the council of *Trent's* order), no one shall be suffered to read translations of scripture, even though made by Catholics, as they call themselves, unless the bishop or inquisitor, by the advice of the curate or confessor, give him leave in writing: and whoever transgresses this rule, shall not be absolved till he gives up his bible. Nay, throughout the whole kingdom of *Spain*, all bibles in their own tongue are absolutely forbidden. And in all Popish countries, getting one, by the means here prescribed, being a matter of time, and form, and difficulty, and suspicion, the generality seldom put themselves to the trouble of it. So that in many parts

of the world there are great multitudes of that communion, who perhaps have never either read or heard, in their own tongue, one chapter of the Bible in their whole lives. Or if any one does ask for leave, it is never granted, where they dare refuse it, excepting to such as they are well assured beforehand will see nothing there but what they are bidden. So that where they have permission to read the scripture, they have none to understand it. Besides that, this permission, even in those countries where they are obliged to indulge it the most freely, as in our own, is but during pleasure, and may at any time be taken away when it will serve the turn better: nor dare the poor deluded people, upon pain of damnation, help themselves. And as to Protestant translations, having one is looked on as a mark of heresy; for which, in this very nation, poor creatures have been burnt, and their bibles with them. Which practice now, think you, is the righter, theirs or ours? What authority can there be on earth to forbid any part of mankind from reading what heaven hath revealed to them? It is the law of our lives, the foundation of our hopes; God hath given it to us, and man hath no right to take it from us. But they tell us, it is from kindness they do it: for there is great danger that the scripture may be misunderstood and perverted: *unlearned and unstable men**, St. Peter hath declared, *may wrest it to their own destruction*. Now this is possible indeed: and so it is possible every thing may be applied to an ill purpose: health, strength, food, liberty, common day-light: but is this a reason for taking away any of them? It is possible that persons may do themselves harm by having the scriptures; but is it not something more than possible, that they may suffer harm from the want of them; and *be destroyed*, as the prophet tells us, *for lack of knowledge*†? Why do not these persons, who are so very cautious in this case, shew the same caution in others, which surely need it full as much? Why do they never restrain any body from image-worship, for fear of their falling into idolatry? Why do they never forbid the use of indulgences, for fear of their being mistaken for a licence to sin? Multitudes of questions like these might be with equal reason asked: and it is
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* 2 Pet. iii. 16.

† Hos. iv. 6.

very strange, methinks, that they should be suspicious of nothing doing harm but the Bible. But after all, is the danger so very great? Hath God Almighty inspired men to write and publish so exceedingly unsafe a book, and so very unfit to be read by the generality of those for whom he intended it, that had not the church of *Rome*, in their great wisdom, forbidden persons to look into it, without their leave, it might have done infinite harm, and does not a little still? We cannot think so. Men were liable to make an ill use of things, to fall into errors and heresies, in all ages: yet neither the prophets under the Old Testament, nor our Saviour and his apostles in the times of the New, ever bethought themselves of this way for preventing it; but recommend and enjoin the reading of scripture in the strongest terms. Now it is wonderful they should not be as wise as those who come after them. St. *Peter* himself, who mentions this danger of men's *wresting the scriptures*, yet does not in the least blame, but suppose, every man's reading them notwithstanding. And St. *Paul*, whose epistles were the very scriptures they wrested, yet never requires them to be kept from any one Christian of the several churches he writes to; nay, most strictly requires the contrary, concerning an epistle as liable to be misunderstood as any of them all, and which actually was misunderstood immediately; I mean his first epistle to the *Thessalonians*. Yet notwithstanding that, *I charge you by the Lord*, says he, *that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren* *. Did then the ancient Christians, in whose days there were heresies in great plenty, did they restrain any of the people from reading the scriptures, in order to preserve them from heresy? No: the *Romanists* do not pretend it. They well know, that a man's delivering up his Bible was always, as it ought to be, the mark of apostasy from religion. They know there is no one thing almost so much insisted on by fathers and councils, as the necessity that all persons, without exception, should be well acquainted with the word of God. Thus little apprehensive was the primitive church of any danger from this practice. The church of *Rome*, we own, has some cause to be apprehensive. For had the people once ge-

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* 1 Thess. v. 27.

neral liberty to read and judge from scripture, there is great danger they might come in general to see, what now they who do see dare not own, how widely it differs from the doctrines commonly taught them. We acknowledge then they are *wise in their generation*. The scripture is against them, and they will be against the scripture: lower its credit as far as they dare: keep it out of mens hands where they can; and where they cannot, they pervert it by false translations, obscure it by false glosses, and *make it of none effect*, by setting up a pretended authority of interpreting it to quite another thing than it evidently means. We, God be thanked, need not these arts, and we use them not. We permit, we beseech, we require you all to read the scriptures diligently, and judge of their meaning impartially; to compare with them every thing we teach you, and believe nothing but what you find agreeable to them. We have no fear of your being poisoned by the food of life, or led into error by the word of truth. On the contrary, we know not any surer way of preserving men from errors, and those of the church of Rome in particular, than that which St. Paul prescribes *Timothy*, in the third chapter of his second epistle. *This know, that in the last days perilous times shall come. Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But continue thou in those things which thou hast learned, and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them: and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*

There are still many other points, in which great corruptions of the *Romish* church might be shewn you. Such is their equalling the apocryphal books to the canonical, which the ancient Christians did not. Such is their modern addition of five new sacraments to those two which Christ appointed, and making the belief of this precise number essential to salvation; making also the priest's intention so necessary to the benefit of the sacraments, that nobody shall be the better for them without it; a person baptised, for instance, shall be no
Christian

Christian notwithstanding, if the priest had malice enough to design he should not. Of the same bad tendency is their burying every part of religion under a load of rites and ceremonies, that turn it into outward shew, and giving it the appearance of art magic, by an infinity of absurd superstitions, many of them the undeniable remains of Heathenism very little disguised; their engaging such multitudes of people in vows of celibacy and useless retirement from the world; their obliging them to silly austerities and abstinences, of no real value, as matters of great merit; their excessive veneration of relics, most of them fictitious and unfit to be thus honoured, were they ever so genuine; their inventions of romantic legends and lying miracles, which make weak and unlearned persons believe any thing; and too many of those, who see through them, believe nothing. And besides these and other errors in spiritual matters, there are many more of most weighty consideration in temporals, which they zealously maintain; their claim of punishing whom they please to call heretics with penalties, imprisonments, tortures, death; their excommunicating and deposing kings; their forbidding divine worship through whole nations at once; their annulling the most sacred promises and engagements, when made to the prejudice of their church; their drawing, by wicked artifices, the wealth of all countries to the support of their own tyranny. But many of these things I have set in a proper light to you on other occasions, and dwelling on all would be endless, as well as unnecessary. Enough, I hope, hath been said to shew you which are in the right; and that *this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand*. For observe; as the whole claim of the church of Rome depends upon her being in all points infallible, so, if in any single point she proves to be mistaken, her pretence of being believed in the rest falls entirely to the ground. But indeed, though for your fuller satisfaction I have confuted many of her doctrines, yet any person may have sufficient satisfaction of his own being in the right way, without so much as knowing or having heard what any one of her doctrines is. For let him but keep close to the creed and the commandments; believe those things which scripture hath made necessary to be believed; and do those things which scripture hath made necessary to be done;

and he is under no manner of obligation to inquire, what any church on earth thinks fit to believe or do besides. Many opinions may be true and useful ; many practices may be innocent and edifying ; but nothing can be matter of necessity, except what Christ and his apostles have required as terms of salvation. Every person, that complies with these, is a true Christian ; every church that teaches these, is a true church : and neither ignorance nor error, about any other matters, can forfeit our title to everlasting life. Search then the scriptures and see : is there any one thing made necessary there which our church forbids ? Is there any one thing declared sinful there which our church requires ? If not, let other churches prohibit or enjoin as they please at their own peril. We are no way bound to inquire what they do, or why. Letting alone their peculiarities, we are sure is safe. Whether making use of them be or not, is their business to consider, not ours. So that were transubstantiation, for instance, and purgatory true ; were the worship of images and praying to saints lawful, which, God knows, they are far from being ; yet as there is no pretence that they are necessary doctrines and practices, the mistake of rejecting them could have no harm in it ; but the uncharitableness of condemning and accursing those who reject them may have great harm. For when once Christ hath said, believe and do such and such things, and you shall be saved ; who is it that shall dare to say, believe and do more, or you shall not be saved ? It is dreadful arrogance, therefore, which the church of *Rome* shews in this respect ; coining new articles of faith, some of which they own were not articles of faith from the beginning ; and sentencing men to hell for not believing what, before that sentence, themselves acknowledge nobody was bound to believe. This, you see, is changing the terms of the Christian covenant arbitrarily, and making a new gospel at their own pleasure. But in opposition to their decisions and *anathemas*, hear one of *St. Paul* : *Though an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we, the apostles of Christ, have preached, let him be accursed.* Trust then yourselves on this foot : for *other foundation can no man lay, than that which they laid* *. Nor indeed did the primitive church,

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* 1 Cor. iii. 11.

for several hundreds of years, attempt it, or make any doctrine necessary which we do not, as the learned well know from their writings, and the unlearned may know from the most ancient of their creeds, which we now use in our constant service. Afterwards indeed needless additions first crept in, then false ones: but, had they begun ever so much sooner, our cause had received no prejudice. *To the law and to the testimony*, as the prophet directs, we appeal: *if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them* *.

* Is. viii. 20.

S E R M O N CII.

THE SACRED SCRIPTURES THE ONLY INFALLIBLE RULE OF
FAITH AND PRACTICE.

I PET. V. 12.

—*Exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God
wherein ye stand.*

I COME now to conclude the subject on which I have been so long employed. A sufficient number of the doctrines of the *Romanists* have been considered, and what they plead for them examined. But besides the pleas they make for each in particular, they have others for all in general. Should they, when they want to make a convert, fairly propose to him each of their notions separately, and give him proofs, first that it is true, and then that it obliges him to quit our communion for theirs; this, they are sensible, would be a hopeless undertaking: and therefore, very wisely, they are for shorter work; and have general arguments, it seems, to prove that, let their doctrines or ours be what they will, we must be in the wrong, and they in the right.

One of these arguments is their infallibility; but this, I hope, was fully confuted in my first discourse, and indeed in every one since. For it is in vain for them to pretend they cannot be mistaken, if it appear but in any single instance that they are.

Another is, that *Protestants*, not being of the *Roman* church, are not of the catholic church; for the catholic church is but one, and, out of it, there is no salvation. Now, we acknowledge it is but one body under one head, Christ Jesus; but then in this one body there are many members; and why are not the churches of *Greece*, *Asia*, and *Africa*; why is not ours

as true a member of it as theirs? On what authority, if names were worth disputing about, do they ingross that of *Catholic* to themselves? Do not we profess the true catholic faith, that faith which the universal church received from the apostles? We profess it much purer than they. Are the sacraments more duly administered by them than by us? Far from it: For of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, one half they have taken away from the laity; and concerning the other half, they have taught the most monstrous absurdities, and built on them the most shocking idolatry. Then, for that of baptism, we administer it with water alone, just as Christ appointed, whereas they have added oil, salt, spittle, and I know not what, as if it were on purpose to make it as unlike his institution as they can. Is then the appointment or ordination of their clergy more valid or more regular than ours? On no account whatever. For if they brought down the succession uninterrupted to the reformation, we have certainly preserved it uninterrupted since; which now they may be ashamed to deny, since a learned man of their own communion hath fully proved it. And consequently, for them, who are but a very unsound part of the catholic church, to call themselves the whole of it, is quite as absurd as for a diseased limb (though perhaps the larger for being diseased), to be called the whole body. But they will say, we separated, and so cut off ourselves from the catholic church at the reformation. I answer, we did not. We only cast out, as was our duty, the errors that were crept in; and we did it by the lawful authority of our superiors, both ecclesiastical and civil. Upon which the church of *Rome*, instead of imitating our good example, commanded all they could influence to quit our communion. It is they then who made the separation, and it is they that continue it. We are ready still to join in communion with them, upon the terms of the gospel; and they refuse to join with us, but upon terms of their own devising. Now, when two churches break communion with one another, though it is always a fault, yet it does not always follow, that either of them is thereby broken off from the catholic church, any more than it follows, that when two men break off acquaintance, one of them is broken off from the civil society to which they belong. But when one church

shall excommunicate another, merely because the governors of that other made such alterations in it as scripture warrants, and because the people complied with those alterations, such an instance of presumption and uncharitableness is much more likely to cut off those that use it from the church of Christ, than those against whom it is used. But supposing we had even acted without, and separated from, our church governors, as our Protestant brethren abroad were forced to do, was there not a cause? When the word of God was hidden from men, and his worship performed in an unknown tongue; when pernicious falsehoods were required to be professed, and sinful terms of communion to be complied with; when church authority, by supporting such things as these, became inconsistent with the ends for which it was established; what remedy was there but to throw it off, and form new establishments? If in these there were any irregularities, they were the faults of those who forced men into them; and are of no consequence, in comparison with the reason that made a change necessary. For were a man to separate himself from every church he knows on earth, in order to obey the laws of Christ, he would still be a most valuable member of that *general assembly and church of the first-born, that are written in heaven* *. For what communion hath light with darkness? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty †.

But it is an article of faith, they tell us, that the church of *Rome* is the mother and mistress of all churches; and therefore to cast off her authority, can never be lawful. We answer, the mother of all churches she certainly is not. For in *Jerusalem* was the first Christian society, and from thence were derived many others, more ancient than that of *Rome*. Nor was that church the mother of the *British* churches, nor of all the *English*. But had the first persons, that founded the gospel here, been sent from *Rome*, that had given them no manner of authority over us. Whence is she then the mistress?

* Heb. xii. 23.

† 2 Cor. vi. 15, 16, 17, 18.

trefs? Why, *St. Peter* was head of the church, and the bishops of *Rome* are his successors. But the scripture tells us, *Christ is head of the church* *, and tells us of no other. We own it was said to *St. Peter*, *Upon this rock will I build my church* †. But this rock, for aught they can ever prove, might be, not *St. Peter's* person, but his confession made immediately before, that *Jesus was the Christ*. Or, if the church was to be built on *St. Peter*, yet not on him alone, but upon the foundation of all the apostles and prophets, as *St. Paul* teaches expressly ‡. And accordingly, the wall of the new *Jerusalem*, or church of God, is said to have twelve foundations, on which were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb §. To *St. Peter* indeed it was promised, that the keys of the kingdom of heaven should be given him, and that whatever he bound or loosed on earth, should be bound or loosed in heaven ||. But this very same, and other as great things, are said to all the apostles equally ¶. *St. Peter* was appointed by Christ to feed his sheep **; but so surely was every one of them. The first rank therefore he might have among the apostles, but authority over them not the least. On the contrary, *St. Paul* tells us, that he withstood *St. Peter* to the face, because he was to be blamed ††: and says of himself, in two different places, that he was in nothing behind, not a whit behind, the very chiefest apostles ‡‡. But had *St. Peter* possessed ever so much authority, what is that to the church of *Rome*? Why, *St. Peter* was bishop of *Rome*. But even this is what they can never prove, nor is it probable. Or if he was, perhaps it was only of the Jewish Christians at *Rome*. For *St. Paul* tells us, the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed to him, and that of the circumcision to *Peter* §§; and the Jewish church there is extinct. Or if bishop of all *Rome*, he was bishop, they say, also of *Antioch*; and why must their church inherit his authority more than that church? But why indeed must it be inherited at all? It was given personally to *St. Peter* as an apostle: what had others to do with it who were no apostles, though they did succeed him as bishops?

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* Eph. i. 22. iv. 15. † Matth. xvi. 18. ‡ Eph. ii. 20. § Rev. xxi. 14.

|| Matt. xvi. 19. ¶ Matt. xviii. 18. John xx. 23. ** John xxi. 15, 16, 17.

†† Gal. ii. 11.

‡‡ 1 Cor. xi. 5. xii. 11.

§§ Gal. ii. 7.

shops? All pre-eminence of one church above another was nothing originally, but an institution of men for convenience and order. *Rome* being the chief city in the world, it was natural to look on the bishop of *Rome* as the chief bishop. And precedence being thus allowed them, by time and opportunity, and arts that were often very wicked ones, they improved it into a claim of authority; to which, though not near the whole church ever submitted, yet at length a great part did. Then to the prerogative, of which they had thus by degrees got possession, they began to pretend Christ himself had originally given them a right. And having managed so well, that part of the world believed them, and part durst not contradict them, they took on them the title of universal bishops, which one of themselves not long before had declared, whoever should take, was the forerunner of Antichrist. And then, under this, they claimed all power over the souls, bodies, and fortunes of men, and exercised it with all possible insolence, rapaciousness, cruelty and impiety.

Now what could there be done, when such a power was thus acquired, and thus exercised, but to throw it off, and assert that liberty to which we had an undoubted right? For as to any scheme of coming to terms, never did the church of *Rome* recede from any one pretension she ever made. The exercise of authority she hath omitted indeed, whenever she durst not exercise it; but all her claims she hath constantly kept up, and excommunicates yearly, to this day, every prince in *Christendom*, that shall refuse obedience to any constitution of the Pope's whatever. It is true, even the *Papists* princes at present regard not this excommunication, and she knows not how to make them regard it. But were once the *Protestants* reunited to that church, on the terms of allowing her any superiority, who knows how soon a power, that had once risen from nothing to that formidable height which it had attained, may rise again to be as formidable as ever?

Another of their pleas is this: That which was the ancient religion and church must be the true one. Now where was your church, say they, before *Henry* the VIII.? Where was your religion before *Luther*? We answer, our church was before that time just where it is now, only then it was corrupted with many sinful errors, from which it is now reformed.



formed. Still it is the same church it was before ; just as a man formerly addicted to many vices, and afflicted with many distempers, continues the same man, after he hath forsaken the one, and recovered from the other ; and it would be very strange to make his alteration for the better an objection against him. And for our religion, where was that before *Luther* ? Why, wherever Christianity was. Did *Luther* invent the creed, the ten commandments, the two sacraments ? These are the things in which our religion consists, and theirs consists in the same ; only they have added by degrees a number of needless, false, and wicked things to them, which we have cast off again. Our religion therefore is the ancient Christianity, professed from the days of the apostles. But where was their religion in those days, I mean the doctrines in which they differ from us ? All of them hundreds of years later ; many of them a thousand ; some of them established no longer ago than the council of *Trent*, which is since the time of *Luther*. For then, and not before, was it, that they filled up the measure of their iniquities, which had long been growing ; equalled their own traditions to the word of God ; and added a new creed to the old one. Our rejecting their additional doctrines, we own, is new ; and no wonder, for the doctrines themselves are new. Some of them indeed reigned much too long : had they been rejected sooner, it had been the better ; but better late than never. Still, our denying these is no more part of our religion, properly speaking, than our denying *Mahometanism*, or the idolatry of the *Chinese*, is part of our religion. Were it not for their pressing them upon us, our people should never hear them mentioned. We take no pleasure in exposing their absurdities, but are heartily grieved at them ; and have much better employment for our hearers than these controversies, did not their restless endeavours to pervert men make it sometimes necessary.

But this plea of their church being the most ancient, they sometimes put in a different form ; and tell us, that either the *Romish* church established here before the reformation was the church, or it was not. If it was, why do we protest against it ? If it was not, how can ours be a true church, which is derived from it ? The answer is very plain. In one respect, as their church professed the fundamentals of Christianity,

tianity, it was, and is a true church ; and so far ours is derived from it. In another respect, as it obscured and contradicted them by unjustifiable doctrines and practices, it was not a true church ; and so far we protest against it. Their truths we have preserved ; their errors we have rejected. In one sense we are the same church with them still ; in the other we are not the same, but a much better.

Another way which they have of arguing against the reformation, is aspersing the characters of those who were engaged in it, and ascribing bad motives to them. Now, as to this, if the main thing done was right, as it plainly was, what sort of instruments God employed in it, or what their personal inducements were, is of no consequence to us in the least. *Jehu* was an instrument of God in destroying *Baal* out of *Israel*, and executing vengeance on the house of *Ahab*, yet very wicked in some respects *. So was *Henry* the VIII. commendable in destroying the supremacy of the Pope, yet highly blameable in other things. The greatest part of the reformers were very good men, and acted from the best of motives. Some of them had doubtless great faults, and might act from bad motives. Nay, such as meant very well, might, in particular things, do very ill. For what constantly happened in all other cases, no wonder if it happened in this. However, the most blameable were not near so bad as the malice of their adversaries represents them ; and had they been much worse, yet they could scarce possibly be so bad as some of those princes, and even of those Popes were, who built up the Antichristian power, which these men demolished.

But whatever becomes of this comparison, still, upon the whole, theirs is the church, they tell us, in which the most numerous and brightest instances of devotion, self-denial, and good works, have shone forth, as the many histories of their saints fully prove ; ours is a low, carnal religion ; most of our people are very bad ; few or none of them eminently good ; and that must be a good church which makes the best men. Now, the truth is, these magnified instances of piety of theirs, are most of them instances only of mere superstition, or blind zeal ; and the saints which they have canonized, were, many

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* 2 Kings x. 28—31.

of them, very weak, and some of them very wicked persons, whose lives are pompously dressed up in legends and fables, to amuse and mislead the ignorant. We, for our parts, leave them to make a noise with fanciful ways of being religious; and doubt not, but we please God much better by performing quietly the real duties of life. And, though we acknowledge and lament that a failure in these is too general amongst us, yet we must remind them, when they insult us upon this, that there is no where on earth more vile and more open wickedness, than where Popery reigns without controul. If, when they live under Protestant governments, they live in a more Christian manner, we are glad of it: but still we hope, even here, the lives of our people are not worse than theirs; and we are sure it is not the fault of our religion, if they are not much better.

But, they tell us, however these things may be, yet their communion is undoubtedly the safer of the two. For they say we cannot be saved, and we own they may be saved; and that church is plainly the safer, in which both sides acknowledge salvation is to be had. But consider, does their saying we are not safe, make us ever the less so in reality? The question is, upon what grounds do they say it? Why, upon none at all, as I have shewn you. And therefore all they can prove by saying it, is their own confidence, of which those persons have generally the most, who have the least reason for it: and their own uncharitableness, for which, if we at all understand Christianity, no side will ever be the safer. Well, but we do not deny that they may be saved. No more do I, or they deny, but even a virtuous Heathen may have some degree of happiness in another life. Suppose then he should take it into his head to deny that a Christian could, must I turn Heathen to be of the safer side? You see it is just the same case. But after all, do we lay it down as a rule, without exception, that all Papists may be saved? We dare not say so. Some of them go much more unjustifiable lengths than others: the ill things that many of them do, they do in ignorance; this, we hope, will be an excuse for them in a great measure. Yet, even for the most ignorant, their salvation is grievously hazardous, amidst so many corruptions, which, one should think, even they might perceive to be

such ; and so many temptations to neglect that *holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord* *. The condition of the learned amongst them, who, when the light is before their eyes, continue in darkness, and keep others in it, is still more dangerous. But in the worst state of all are they, who being born *children of light*, return to darkness again, and sin wilfully after they had been bred up amongst us in the knowledge of the truth. Yet even among these there are very different degrees of guilt. Such, whose good meaning hath been misled by plausible artifices, we would still hope well of ; though doubtless they must have been sinfully negligent of informing themselves concerning the grounds of their first belief, else they had never left it. A second sort, who depart from what, in their consciences, they believe is the truth, merely because a presumptuous man tells them, they cannot be saved if they adhere to it, these are much more blameworthy than the former. But for such as, either for the love of worldly interest, or the wretched hope of reconciling sin and salvation together, turn aside from the way of righteousness, and forsake that pure and holy communion, which the good providence of God hath placed them in ; as to such, we cannot judge favourably, and we will not judge hardly ; *there is one that judgeth* †, *who will also render to every man according to his deeds* ‡ : but indeed we can see no promise of their finding *mercy in that day*. Suffer not yourselves then to be moved either by vain threatenings or false promises, nor ever think to be safe in any other way, than that of first inquiring carefully what your duty is, and then keeping close to the practice of it. Be assured it is safe to worship God, through Jesus Christ, and let all other worship alone ; safe to receive the holy communion as our Lord himself gave it ; to pray in a language you all understand ; and make that holy word, *which was written for your learning* §, the foundation and rule of your faith, your practice, and your hopes. Fear not but you are safe in doing this, whether the *Romanists* be safe in doing otherwise or not. God grant they may ! but God forbid that any of us should try. Bear with me now but a few minutes longer, whilst I give you, in conclusion,

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* Heb. xii. 14. † John viii. 50. ‡ Rom. ii. 6. § Rom. xv. 4.

some seasonable directions for your behaviour towards those of that church.

First then, let none of their bad doctrines or practices ever tempt you in the least to any hard treatment of them. Justice and mercy, equity and charity, are main parts of religion; and a failure in these is one of the worst of heresies into which we can fall. We know the church of *Rome* hath failed in them greatly; our ancestors have felt their cruelty; our Protestant brethren abroad groan under it at this day; and may God preserve us and our posterity from the danger of it; for never had they mercy long when they had power. Careful self-defence against such a spirit must be allowed us; but, as to any thing farther, in those things for which we blame them, let us not be like them. The severe laws we have in force against them, are not for their religious opinions, but for their refusing to own, and promise due obedience to, the government under which they live; and they have long experience, that nothing but absolute necessity will ever oblige our superiors to put any of these laws into execution. Let us therefore shew, in our private capacities, the same good temper. As men, they have a title to all humanity; as Christians, though mistaken, they have a yet stronger claim to our forbearance and tenderness. Their doctrines indeed are dangerous; their practices have been dreadful; but this, in a great measure, hath arisen from ignorance, and *a zeal of God, though not according to knowledge* *. Numbers of them, without doubt, inwardly disapprove religious cruelties, and think at least they could never be brought to join in them. However this may be (which God forbid should ever come to be tried), yet, in the mean time, nothing hinders, but as in religion they may, to the best of their judgment, be sincerely pious, so in common life they may be just and honest, friendly and neighbourly. Let us therefore, with much better-natured principles, be sure not to appear worse-natured persons; but recommend our profession to all the world, by that *wisdom which is from above, first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits* †.

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* Rom. x. 2.

† James iii. 17.

In the next place, let nothing which hath been said make those, who are not some way called to it, over-forward to dispute about these matters with persons of more learning and art than themselves. For a man may have very good reasons on his side, and yet be so little qualified to set them in the best light, that an excellent cause may be hurt by want of skill in managing it. What I have endeavoured is only that you may *be able*, as St. Peter directs, *to give an answer to them that ask you a reason of the hope that is in you* *. In doing which, remember you are concerned only to be on the defensive. They are to prove, if they can, that every one of their doctrines is not only true, but an article of faith; and every one of their practices not only lawful, but necessary. Till they have done all this, you have no reason to change; and when they have done it, we allow you to change. But observe one thing; if you hear them deny any of the points with which they have been charged, do not be staggered at it. Would to God they were not guilty of them! They would be more in the right, and we should be never the less so. But do not think a charge unjust, because they confidently say it is. The more ignorant of them here among us, perhaps, do not know the worst part of their doctrines; and the more learned will not own them till they are forced. These concealments are no new things with them. In some countries many of their missionaries have concealed a great part of the Christianity they pretended to teach, and allowed Heathenism to be blended with it, in order to make converts, such as they are, the more easily. No wonder then if here they veil over their corruptions with a fair mask, which, if we do not pull off, they will not throw off, till the proper time comes.

Another thing is, if ever you should be pressed with any of their arguments which I have mentioned, and not perhaps remember the answer to it, still remember you have heard it answered; and any one of you may, at any time when you desire it, have the answer repeated and farther explained to you. Or if any other argument should be used, to which you cannot of yourselves reply, consult those that can; tell us
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* 1 Pet. iii. 15.

your difficulties in time ; be assured such as would keep you from this, do not mean honestly ; give us but a fair hearing before you determine to leave us, and we doubt not your staying with us. Even if any of you should be unhappily brought to think favourably of some of their doctrines, remember still how monstrous others of them are ; and yet, if you do not swallow all, you have done nothing. We allow persons to have very different opinions from us in some points, and suffer them to continue among us as very good Christians notwithstanding ; but their church makes no abatement ; their very grossest errors must be professed, or you are none of them. Think well then what you do ; and, as I once advised before, never let subtlety and sophistry, whether you know exactly how to answer it or not, prevail against scripture and reason ; but ever stick to the plain word of God, and plain common sense.

One direction more I have of the utmost importance ; which is, if ever we would secure ourselves to good purpose against the dangers of false religion, let us carefully promote the profession and practice of the true. If persons are bred up in no knowledge of, and no zeal for, the principles of their own church, no wonder that they are easily carried off and seduced into another. If they are encouraged to live without regard to God, many of them, however, will be afraid to die so too ; and then that communion, which makes the largest promises of forgiveness on the *easiest* terms, will be almost sure to be embraced by them. Men, wise in their own imaginations, think they are sure to root out superstition, if they plant infidelity. But mankind must, and will have some religion ; and if they forsake a good one, sooner or later the uncomfortableness of unbelief, and the terrors of conscience after a wicked life, will drive most of them to a worse. Besides, whilst we are divided and negligent about these matters, the emissaries of the church of *Rome* are united and active, and never with more sanguine hopes, than when they can plead experience, that the liberty allowed by the Protestant religion leads men of course to throw off all religion. These are plain reasons for a public regard to piety and virtue ; and there are yet more important ones for a private conscientious practice of them ; for that, after all, is the only thing that will estab-

bliss us in the truth, fill our hearts with peace and comfort in this life, and give us everlasting happiness in the next. If then you have any concern, either for the honour of that church to which you belong, for the welfare of your country, or the salvation of your souls, *let your conversation be as becometh the gospel of Christ* *. Pity and pray for them who are in error, that God would *give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth* †; and *building up yourselves*, as St. Jude exhorts, *on your most holy faith, keep yourselves in the love of God; looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life* ‡.

Now, unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen §.

* Phil. i. 27. † 2 Tim. ii. 25. ‡ Jude, ver. 20, 21. § Jude, ver. 24, 25.

S E R M O N CIII.

THE GREAT IMPORTANCE IN LIFE OF FREQUENT REFLECTION
AND SELF-EXAMINATION.

HAGGAI, i. 5.

Now therefore, thus saith the Lord of Hosts, Consider your ways.

THE faculty of reviewing our past lives, and the present state of our hearts, in order to approve what is right, or condemn what is wrong in either, carries with it an evident obligation upon all men, to exercise it constantly and uprightly. It is a principle, that implies in its very nature an authority over the whole of our conduct; and we every one feel ourselves most intimately bound to obey its dictates. Even when we doubt in particular how we are to act, we must know in general, that we are to act as truth and conscience direct; and not to examine what they direct, or whether we are following it, or transgressing the first fundamental law of moral agents. So that indeed God our Maker saith to each of us continually, by the inward voice of our own breasts, *Consider your ways*. A precept universally acknowledged, and highly honoured, even by Heathens; but peculiarly enforced on Christians, as it is not only often and solemnly enjoined in scripture, but, to secure all possible regard to it, self-examination is incorporated into the most sacred rite of our holy religion (participation of the blessed sacrament,) as its vast importance well deserved.

For in the midst of so many passions and appetites as compose our frame; so many disorders in it as we are born with; so many more as we have superadded; such powerful temptations as surround us on every side; we cannot hope, that
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the carefullest attention to ourselves will keep us entirely free from faults ; but without such care, we shall fall into many more and worse ; we shall go much greater lengths in them ; we shall continue the wrong conduct we have once begun. blind to its guilt and peril, or only quit one error to adopt another, till we fix ourselves down in a confirmed state of sin and misery. By a little neglect of culture, a soil so fruitful of ill weeds, will soon be covered with them ; besides, that the best inclinations of the best minds, if left to themselves, will run wild and degenerate. And proportionally as persons are more exempted from the free admonition of others, the more certainly and dangerously they must err, unless preserved by a most vigorous use of their own self-reflections.

A duty, thus plain and thus necessary, God will doubtless expect us to perform very faithfully. And what the Almighty commands, we shall always find it our interest to do, never to omit. When we have acted amiss, indeed, we must feel pain in thinking of it. But it is pain in order to a cure, which health and ease will follow ; whereas, the cowardice of not searching our wounds will inevitably make them fatal. In some of the most trifling affairs of life, we should think it strangely absurd, not to observe what we are doing. But how vastly more is it so in the management of the whole of life ; on which our happiness or misery depends, in time and to eternity !

We cannot bear, perhaps, to be so serious. But if we refuse it, sooner or later we shall assuredly be driven to it. And never have there been in the world poor creatures so dreadfully serious, as they who have resolved to be always gay and thoughtless. Terrors of mind, pains of body, perplexity of affairs, have come to be their hourly companions, till, very often, life itself hath grown insupportable to them, and they have desperately broken out of it, and even that in vain. Here, or hereafter every one must think ; will we then do it, while it may avail us ; or, when it can only aggravate our sufferings ? Besides, persons of the greatest levity are serious in some points ; as earnest as they are capable of being, about matters that very little deserve it ; and why not about the one thing needful ?

But, possibly we are not convinced that our behaviour is of such infinite and eternal importance. However, at least, it is of importance to examine, whether it be or not. That inquiry can do us no harm; and it may do us good beyond conception.

But, perhaps, we have inquired, and think there is reason to doubt of what we are commonly taught concerning these matters. But when did we begin to think so? Was it before we had grossly sinned; or, however, were pretty much resolved to sin, and wanted to be made easy in it? Or was it not in consequence of imagining, that an *infidel* way of thinking would give us a distinguished and *fashionable* air? If so, what chance was there, that our inquiry should be a fair one? It is not picking up from others, or *inventing* ourselves a few jests and cavils, or even real objections against religion, that entitles us to say we have examined it; but an impartial thorough search into every thing, within our reach, favourable to it, as well as contrary. What authors then have we read, with what men of learning and abilities have we conversed on the religious side of the question? And with what sort of spirit have we done it? We have been caught, it may be, with somewhat that appears ridiculous. But may not every thing almost be made to appear so to a light mind? We have been shocked, perhaps, by more solid difficulties. But are there not such in all parts of knowledge? Are there not much greater in what infidels believe, than what Christians believe? Whoever looks closely into the matter, will find that their credulity, beyond comparison, exceeds ours. Or, supposing, after some honest inquiry, we still doubt; have we not often doubted long, of what at last we found true? Would we tamely give up our title to an estate, or an honour, because a few suspicions were started about it, that we could not immediately confute? And doth not our whole title, to no less than eternal felicity, stand and fall with our religion?

But further; what do we doubt of? Not surely of all the articles of faith, and all the obligations of life. Have we then considered well, what the undoubted ones are, and how far they ought to influence our conduct? Whenever we do, we shall certainly find, that no one part of it can safely be vicious; and, indeed, that there is not the least firm ground to
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stand on, between uniform piety and morals, and uniform profligateness and villainy. If God and virtue are realities, we are bound to every thing which they require in every case. If they are not, we are bound to nothing in any case. Whoever then is shocked at the latter supposition, must take refuge in the former, and consequently see it his duty, to weigh all his behaviour deliberately and impartially.

We find it but too easy, if we will, to judge very favourably of almost the worst actions we have ever done. At least, between disguising them with false colours, and hurrying on to do and think of somewhat else, we can for the most part quiet, if not applaud ourselves, especially if others, above all, others of our own rank, are guilty of them without scruple. And even sins that we thought heinous ones, when they were just committed, after some time we grow to imagine scarce worth notice; as if distance lessened the reality of objects, as well as the appearance. But God sees every thing in its true light and magnitude, and surely then it is our concern to see it so too. For what can it avail us, to imagine pleasing falsehoods, when we are to stand so soon, indeed stand always, before a judge, who discerns the very bottom of our souls, and to whom a thousand years are but as one day?

Have we then examined, as in his presence, our lives and hearts? And by what standard have we tried their innocence or guilt? The practice of others can no more justify us, than ours can them. Mere fancy and inclination is no rule at all. And reason, if biased, is next to none. Have we then really done our utmost to divest it of self partiality, to enlighten it by the instruction of pious and judicious friends and books, and, above all, to direct it by the unerring word of God? The written laws of that, cannot be moulded into what we please, like the variable arguings of our own minds; but will unmoveably oppose our most darling passions, if they be wrong. And since our final state must be judged by it, surely our present ought too.

If then there be any persons, (and God grant there be not many here) who have never duly obeyed his great command of considering their ways; *To-day, if ye will hear his voice,*
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harden not your hearts *. To-morrow may be quite too late ; and at best every delay will make self-inspection more painful, and our condition more hopeless. But how carefully soever we may have searched into our breasts already, fresh occasions for it will be daily rising, and unless the repetition of it be frequent, we shall perform it ineffectually, and very soon leave it off entirely. The present season, indeed, is a yearly memorial of recollection and seriousness. But as the mere outward shew of it is of no value ; so the more real goodness of a few weeks, if it end with them, is of very little. Our business, therefore, is, so to examine ourselves now, as to live more Christianly ever after. And whence can we better begin, than from what we owe to Him, that made us ?

Do we then often think of him, and constantly reverence him, as the wise and good, the just and powerful, ruler of the world ? Do we praise him for his mercies, pray for his pardon, protection and grace, not only now and then in public form, but daily in private, with a deep and awful sense of what we say before him ? Or can we, perhaps, some of us remember when we prayed in secret and in earnest last ! If not, why this neglect of the author of all we enjoy, the disposer of all we hope for ! Can we think it meanness to honour him, even with the lowest submission ? Do we think it meanness in our inferiors to pay due respect to us ? If not, why in us to pay all respect to God ? Will we then at least do it for the future ? Resolving otherwise deliberately, comes very little short of renouncing and defying him ; and dare we then go thus far ? What would it deserve were we to treat an earthly superior so ? What doth it deserve, if we treat the Lord and King of all so ?

But, besides worship, we owe him further, Faith in what he teaches, Obedience to what he commands. Have we then inquired with humility of heart, what doctrines he hath proposed to our belief, what laws he hath prescribed to our conduct, by reason or revelation ? Or do we set up our own fancy and caprice for absolute judges of his declarations and appointments ; indolently and securely determining, that this

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* Psalm cxv. 8.

article of faith, or rule of life, be its evidence what it will, cannot come from him; and another, though it doth, ought, however, to give way to our private interest, ease or humour! Could such treatment of human laws be borne? And will the Almighty and All-wise bear it? *Be not deceived; God is not mocked.*

But, how fully soever we own the authority of religion, do we practise it? What is our great aim and endeavour here? Is it to secure a happy immortality? Or to grasp as many, as we can, of the splendid bubbles of this momentary scene? To get a little more power, or wealth, or rank, and then, with unabated thirst, a little more still, even to the very night that our souls shall be required of us? Whom do we think happy? The virtuous, the humble, the good? Or the artful, the prosperous, the great? What do we rejoice in, or grieve at? Is it our proficiency or failure, in love and duty to God, in reasonableness of heart, uprightness of behaviour, disengagement from this trifling world? Are these the things we are concerned about? Or a very different sort of advantages and pre-eminences, belonging to the present state of things entirely, and many of them quite contemptible, even were no other to follow? When our duty and our interest thwart each other, how do we act? Honestly and cheerfully give up the latter? Or frame poor excuses for preferring it, or unfair contrivances for reconciling it to the former? These are questions of the last importance. For if the *love of the world* be our reigning passion, *the love of the Father is not in us**. Which do we choose then, earth or heaven? Let us not cheat ourselves, but speak it out to our own hearts.

Or, however free in this respect, do we live to no other passion, equally unworthy? Is not our principal view to be admired for some accomplishment, or applauded for some ability, of very little merit? And are we not led both into follies and sins, to obtain and increase a false kind of esteem from others, that will only tempt us to forget ourselves? Do we attentively distinguish, what is truly of value, and to what degree? In how many things of consequence we are de-

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* 1 John ii. 15.

ficient, in how few we excel? And *who hath made us to differ* * from the very meanest of our fellow-creatures? Are we willing, if need require, to be slighted and despised, hated and reproached, for the sake of acting as we ought? Or do we *love the praise of men* †, and *seek not the honour that cometh from God only* ‡?

But, supposing we are clear both of worldliness and vanity, still what can we answer with respect to pleasure? Do we indulge none that is condemned by impartial reason; or, what we are sure is impartial, the word of God? Every forbidden way of gratifying sensual desires, visibly produces many and dreadful mischiefs and crimes. Excess and intemperance ruin the healths, the understandings, the usefulness, the fortunes, the families of men. Breach of chastity produces all the same evils, and extends them further; brings innocent persons into guilt and dishonour, under treacherous pretences of esteem and love; involves their innocent friends in distress and shame along with them, and occasions innumerable evils, private and public. But particularly, breach of the marriage-vow dissolves the very bonds of human society. For if faith and truth, solemnly given, oblige not, oblige not both sexes, in this case, why do they in any other? Are we then innocent in these respects; or have we repented; or do we despise the threatening, that *they, who do such things, shall not inherit the kingdom of God* §?

And, in regard to other indulgences, have we acted as becomes rational natures, designed to prepare ourselves, by the discipline of this life, for spiritual happiness in a better? Do we guard with care against sinking into delicacy and indolence, against being dissipated amidst a hurry of gaieties, or lost in polite amusements and elegant trifles; or are we *lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God* ||? What proportion of our income do we spend in deeds of piety, charity, and proper beneficence? What proportion of our time in the religious and moral improvement of our hearts, and the real duties of our respective stations? All the wealth we have, and every hour we live, we must account for. Can we do it with joy?

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* 1 Cor. iv. 7.

† John xii. 43.

‡ John v. 44.

§ Gal. v. 21.

|| 2 Tim. iii. 4.

Can we say we have been hitherto *working, while it was day, the works of him that sent us* *? If not, will we now reflect how fast the night approaches?

Another very material head of examination is that of our resentments. Do we bear ill-will to no one, for excelling or coming too near us in rank, in power, in favour, in fortune, in qualifications of body or mind? Are we offended at no one, for doing what he justly might, perhaps what he ought; or, at least, apprehended himself bound to? Have we inquired, with diligence and candour, into the truth and motives of the fact we are displeased with, and in effect heard both sides? Do we make all fit allowances for the merit, for the repentance of the offending party, for human infirmity in general? Do we never punish but when it is plainly needful; and never then, but by lawful means, and in a proper degree; never accuse but when we have evident reason; and always confine ourselves, in doing it, to the *words of truth and soberness* †? We have been guilty ourselves of many and great faults, both against God and man: do we forgive, as we hope to be forgiven?

A further inquiry yet must be (an extremely comprehensive and interesting one), what is the tendency of our common discourse and conversation? Is it favourable to religion, to probity, to decency, to good will among men, or the contrary? Doth it express dislike of wickedness and folly, though countenanced by fashion; or excuse, if not approbation, of whatever chances to be in vogue? Doth it shew, that *in our eyes a vile person is contemned, but we honour them that fear the Lord* ‡? Or do we love to palliate the sins of the former, and aggravate the failures of the latter? Have we indeed ever thought of rules on this subject? Or said, *Our lips are our own, Who is Lord over us* §? Yet licentious talk, of every kind, doth unspeakable mischief. We all complain of it when we suffer by it. And when other persons, when society, when the honour of God, when piety and virtue suffer by it, there is evidently the same, there is often far greater guilt in it. And, since our hearts are as much concerned in what we say as what we do, the declaration is perfectly reasonable:

* John ix. 4.

† Acts xxvi. 25.

‡ Ps. xv. 4.

§ Ps. xii. 4.

sonable: *By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned* *. Which then shall we be?

But our behaviour must be regulated, not only towards our fellow-creatures in general, but with a closer view to the more particular relations of life. If married persons, are we faithful, affectionate, considerate, mild, prudent? If children, do we make thankful returns for the care and tenderness of our parents; obey them dutifully; and pay them all that honour which we shall certainly expect hereafter to be paid us? If parents, do we preserve towards our children a proper temperature of authority and condescension, and watch over and provide for those to whom we have given being, so as may best secure their true happiness, and our own comfort in them, now and at the great day? If heads of families, have we due regard to the present and eternal good of those whom we take under our roof, remembering that we also have a master in heaven? If servants, do we behave with singleness of heart, shewing all fidelity, as unto the Lord, and not to men? As subjects, do we express, in word and deed, the reverence and the gratitude we owe to those whom Providence hath put in authority over us? Whether our condition be private or public, do we act in it unbiassed, to the utmost of our knowledge, by interest, prejudice, and partial affection? If employed in affairs, are we vigilant and upright, and studious, in all things, of the general good, as men *fearing God, and hating covetousness* †? If advanced to stations of eminence and power, do we countenance religion, virtue, merit, and discourage the worthless and profligate? Or only wonder the world is so bad, when we have contributed to make it so? or conclude it can never be good, when indeed we have tried no means to reform it?

Further, in this situation, are we careful what sort of example we set others to copy after; and sufficiently apprehensive (for we can hardly be too much), that not only our sins, but our imprudences, actions that are imprudent only as they endanger others, may produce an incredible deal of evil in those around us and beneath us; whereas God expects all persons to be his ministers for good, in proportion to the abilities and opportunities with which he hath entrusted them.

Nor

* Matth. xii. 37.

† Exod. xviii. 21.

Nor should we stop at considering what our faults have been; that alone would be a speculation of little use; but proceed to think what must follow from them. Indeed, have we not already some of us found our characters, our fortunes, our healths, impaired by them? Or, at least, will they not of necessity, in a little time? Hath not the happiness we promised ourselves from our transgressions, proved very insignificant, or very short-lived! Have they not often brought upon us dreadful anguish and distress; and sometimes forced us into most destructive methods of trying to get rid of the torment of thought? Or, how joyfully soever we go on at present, yet the further we go, must not our return be more difficult; and unless we return, our end more deplorable? Nay indeed, will not the less blameable, the allowable indulgences of this world, if we pursue them eagerly, and live chiefly to them, exclude or wear out from our souls, those impressions of, and attentions to serious piety, which alone will bring us peace in our last hour? We can affect, it may be, to talk of death with much indifference, but have we in earnest brought it near to us, and considered what it is? An immediate passage, without recall, into that state, where small and great shall stand before God; who, as surely as he governs the world with justice and wisdom, *will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil**, and recompence us all according to our use of every talent committed to us. Are we then prepared against that day? Ready for the searcher of hearts, were he to call us now to our final account? If not, do we reflect how soon we may be called, how soon we must, and what the consequences will be for ever? Do we then at length resolve against all sin, all occasions of sin, all supineness and negligence from this time forwards? Are we unfeignedly sorry that we have resolved it no sooner? Are we deeply sensible, that, in all we have done amiss, we have provoked a most holy God; and have no claim to pardon, much less to happiness hereafter, but through the mercy procured by our blessed Redeemer? And will we accordingly fly to him alone, with an humble faith in the atonement of his death, and the efficacy

* Eccl. xii. 14.

efficacy of his grace; or boldly hazard all, on the sufficiency of our own strength, which hath deceived us so often; and the imagined merits of our own righteousness, or our own repentance, imperfect and defective as they both are?

Think not any of these harsh and ill-natured questions; they are the very friendliest that can be proposed. Think them not gloomy and melancholy inquiries; they are the ground-work of all true comfort. No one indeed hath a right to require an answer to them from another; but God hath full right to command, as he doth, by his word and the preachers of it, that every one put them home to his own soul. They carry still more terror to those, who are bound by their office to utter them, than to those who sit and hear them; but terror inexpressible to all who provide not to answer them well; and joy inexpressible to all that do. *Let us therefore conscientiously search and try our ways, and turn unto the Lord our God* *. Let us beg of him fervently, to shew us what manner of persons we have been, are, and ought to be; and say to him, in the words which he himself hath dictated, *Who can tell how oft he offendeth? O cleanse thou me from my secret faults* †. *Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my heart: prove me, and examine my thoughts. Look well, if there be any way of wickedness in me, and lead me in the way everlasting* ‡.

* Lament. iii. 40.

† Ps. xix. 12.

‡ Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.

S E R M O N C I V .

PARDON, GRACE, AND EVERLASTING LIFE, TO BE OBTAINED
ONLY THROUGH THE MERITS OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

2 COR. V. 21.

*For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that
we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*

THESE words contain that great article of the Christian faith, that the death of our blessed Saviour hath obtained for us pardon, grace and everlasting life; which important truth is so strangely disregarded, even by many who call themselves his disciples, that I think it necessary

I. To confute the prejudices that lead men to think slightly of their need of the satisfaction which he made on our behalf, before I proceed

II. To explain and defend this part of the Christian doctrine.

I. Our condition, with respect to God, is infinitely the most important of all our concerns, for we are absolutely in his power alone; and the forgiveness of our sins is the most important article in that condition. Were we innocent creatures, we could only doubt what happiness we had to hope for from him; and about that we might be, though not indifferent, yet free from anxiety. But as we are all guilty, the first question, and a very alarming one, is, what punishment we have to fear? Thoughtlessness and partiality may indeed dispose us to imagine, that however right in speculation the laws of religion and virtue may be, yet in practice great allowance is due to inclination, this being as truly part of our nature as reason. And when persons find many others that seem to judge in the same manner (especially if some of

them be of that rank, which is admitted in most things to set the pattern), then, in companies together, they can go almost any lengths; decide in a moment, that this is superstition, and that preciseness; that such restraints are absurd, such others unnecessary; and take fancy and fashion, mixed together as it happens, for the only rules of life, without a single reflection whether they are acting as they ought, or the least apprehension, that, if they are not, any harm will follow, provided they guard against a few present inconveniences. Yet many of these perhaps are people of conscience in some things, but in others, they despise all mention of it; and, for the most part, if they behave tolerably well to their fellow-creatures, have scarce the notion of any duty they owe to their Creator, at least beyond the mere propriety of attending his worship now and then, in compliance with a custom that is not yet quite worn out.

Now, would but such men venture on a very safe thing, a little serious thought, they would soon perceive, that, though inclination is a part of our nature, yet every inclination must not be gratified, for this would be mischievous both to all around us and to ourselves: that therefore we ought to have some rule, which to indulge, and which to restrain: that fancy and fashion can never be the rule; for both are continually varying, and would often lead us to dishonour and ruin: that we have within us a natural sense of right and wrong, which passes judgment with authority on our actions, frequently whether we will or not; and that, if it be in many cases obscure and weak, our business is to improve and strengthen it: that the great and wise Being, who hath made us and all things, must intend we should behave suitably to this consciousness which he hath given us, and obey whatever commands he may think fit to superadd: that both his holiness and his goodness oblige him, as the Sovereign of the world, to preserve due order amongst his subjects, by recompensing them as they deserve; for that some actions deserve well, and some ill, we every one of us inwardly feel.

Yet we are very apt to persuade ourselves, that it is beneath him to look so low as the passions and follies of such inconsiderable creatures as we are. But I intreat you to consider: Is there, upon earth, that creeping thing, that weed,

that smallest particle of dead matter, which God hath not formed with inexpressible wisdom, and doth not govern by stated laws, which have all their force from the never-ceasing exertion of his power? And how can we doubt then of his governing the rational, that is, the noblest part of his creatures; by laws equally adapted to them, by precepts, rewards, punishments? What is there worthy of him to do, if this be not? But indeed, he hath both assured us of his doing it, and we experience that he doth it. We perceive his injunctions and prohibitions within us; we pass his sentence on ourselves when we do amiss; we undergo corrections of his appointment, when we suffer for what we have done; and by these specimens of his justice now, he warns us of the full execution of it hereafter. For if wickedness escape, and finally triumph, in one single instance, then is God no longer infinitely perfect, but partial or impotent, like one of us. Earthly princes confine their care to the most important points, because attending to every point is not below them, but above them. The nearer they can approach towards it, the livelier images they are of him, who *humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and earth**, and who *numbereth the hairs of our heads*†, and weighs every thought of our hearts. Let not good persons be terrified at this, for *he knows whereof we are made, and is merciful to them that fear him*‡. But let the inconsiderate, the rash and the bold, learn from it, both to be cautious how they act, and to recollect how they have acted. We seem very commonly to think, that the sins of our former days lose their guilt in proportion to their distance, and are gradually annihilated as the impression of them wears out of our minds. But with God what is past is not gone. On the contrary, unless we entitle ourselves duly to forgiveness, it remains on record an indelible evidence against that day, when *the books shall be opened, and the dead be judged out of the things which are written in them*§.

It greatly concerns us therefore to look back on all our faults, that we may see distinctly what our true condition is. Probably enough, on a superficial inquiry, the verdict may be highly to our advantage. But our business is to make a thorough

* Ps. cxlii. 5, 6. † Matth. x. 30. ‡ Ps. ciii. 13, 14. § Rev. xx. 12.

thorough search, and know the reality; by placing before our thoughts (after composing them in a serious temper), first the several rules of a godly, righteous, and sober life, made known to us by reason and scripture, then our own conduct under each head. Whoever hath not examined thus, has need to begin immediately; and whoever hath, will have need to repeat his work frequently from time to time. But the present season is peculiarly appropriated to pious recollection. If therefore we contrive methods of running away from it now, we too plainly signify our intention of neglecting it for ever; and if those contrivances be public and professed ones, we offend against common decency, as well as religion.

In the performance of this duty, we ought by no means to accuse ourselves falsely; but it would be a fatal mistake to flatter ourselves; to overlook or extenuate the faults we have committed, or fancy, that be they ever so bad, we could not help it, and others have done worse; and nothing remains but to be easy about the matter. How many soever have done amiss, they shall all account for their doings; for numbers of criminals can never change wrong into right; and judging the world is no harder to God, than condemning a single person. He hath notified his will to us all, by the light of our own conscience, by the revelation of his holy word, by the instructions of other religious books, by the private admonitions of our friends, by the public warnings of his ministers. He hath given us much more strength to perform our duty than we use: he is ready, on our humble request, to add to it as much as we want. And in these circumstances it can never be a slight matter, if, in any one instance, we have been disobedient or negligent towards him; have unjustly hurt or disregarded any of his creatures, our brethren; have corrupted or debased our own natures; and behaved unsuitably to the condition in which he hath placed us, or the spiritual bliss for which he hath designed us.

We are strangely disposed to consider some transgressions as being subjects of mirth only. But in truth, every departure from the rule of right, and the commands of our Maker, is a thing of great moment; and what we are pleased to imagine trifling, were it not for custom and self-partiality, we should

fee to be of great consequence. We are also extremely apt to think our faults more important, in almost every other view, than as they offend God; and yet the direct contrary is one of the plainest truths that can be. For as all we enjoy proceeds from him; as our happiness or misery depends entirely upon him; and every bad thing we do (whomsoever else it may injure or not), is always injurious to his authority, and hateful to his holy nature; he is evidently, beyond all comparison, the person whom we are continually to have most in our thoughts, whose favour we should chiefly desire, whose displeasure we should chiefly dread. If therefore we have acted amiss (and who hath not, in more and greater points than he is willing to allow)? barely acting otherwise, without regard to God as interested in the case, can never be enough. Till we feel a deep sense in our hearts of the unworthiness of our behaviour towards him, we are far from becoming inwardly what we ought: and unless we keep alive and strengthen that sense, by humbly and frequently expressing it to him, with earnest desires of his pardon and grace, and hearty endeavours of amendment, we neglect the methods of reconciliation and recovery, which reason itself points out to us.

There are so few brought thus far in religion, that very possibly the first natural thought of a great part of them may be, that nothing farther can be wanting to procure them forgiveness and future happiness. And it is very true, that we can do no more, not so much indeed, without the divine interposition. But it by no means follows, that this will be enough, even to save us from punishment, much less to obtain us reward, and least of all the unspeakable reward of everlasting life. As the laws of God are just, he may justly inflict the penalties of them on transgressors. As he is the moral governor of the universe, he must support the honour of his government throughout his creation. Human government can never be supported, without making a great difference, in many cases, between penitent persons and innocent ones. Whether the divine can or not, we none of us know; for the extent of it is boundless; and we are acquainted but very imperfectly with so much as our own small part. Even in this, we see, that by the constitution of things, which God hath

hath appointed, repentance often avails not at all, and often very imperfectly, to prevent the bad effects in this world of our faults and follies. And how shall we be sure, that the same kind of rules, which we experience to take place here, may not also take place hereafter? Whatever therefore God shall reveal to us concerning these matters, we ought to receive with implicit reverence; and use, with the utmost thankfulness, any method which he shall inform us is necessary, or expedient, in order to avoid the ill consequences of our sins, though possibly we perceive no manner of connection between the remedy and the cure. Nor shall we, in so doing, pay any greater regard to the all-wise God (though unspeakably greater is his due), than we pay continually, and should be inexcusable if we did not, to our poor ignorant fellow-creatures, whom we trust, full *as* implicitly, with our fortunes, our healths, and our lives.

What then hath God taught us concerning our case? That neither such repentance, nor such reformation, as we are capable of, will suffice to obtain us forgiveness and eternal happiness. For he hath ordained farther means for these ends: and he certainly would not, without cause, especially such extraordinary means as those in the text, which I have purposely deferred to mention, till having shewn you, that pardon is the great thing we all want, and cannot of ourselves secure, I might dispose you to embrace, with a more joyful faith, that reviving assurance, that *Him who knew no sin, God hath made to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him.* And this doctrine I now proceed

II. To explain and defend.

The natural and obvious meaning of these words, interpreted jointly with innumerable other passages of scripture, is, that our gracious Maker, being desirous perfectly to relieve mankind, both from the original bad effects of the fall of our first parents, and the personal guilt of our own transgressions; but perceiving, in his unsearchable wisdom, sufficient reasons not to do it on such confessions and submissions only as we were able to make, appointed that his ever-blessed Son (who voluntarily condescended to engage in the merciful work), should take upon him the likeness of sinful flesh, and bear, for our sakes, inconveniences and sufferings, from which
otherwise

otherwise the dignity and the purity of his nature entirely exempted him ; that he took upon him the form of man, not only in order to teach the doctrines, and exemplify the practice of true religion, which men had almost forgotten, but also to undergo that painful and ignominious death, which he foresaw wicked persons, offended by his reproofs, would inflict on him ; that this consent of his *to be made sin for us*, to be crucified as a malefactor on our account, foreknown from eternity, our heavenly Father hath been pleased to consider as a sin-offering made to himself ; an acknowledgment, on our behalf, of the ill desert of disobedience ; a satisfaction, in our stead, to the honour of his justice ; and an inducement to bestow on all, who shall qualify themselves for receiving it, such full pardon as else they could never have had. Thus, by *making him to be sin for them, he makes them the righteousness of God through him* ; that is, on account of Christ's yielding to be treated as a criminal, he treats them as no longer criminals ; giving them joyful proofs here of his protecting providence and sanctifying grace, and raising them up hereafter, from the universal sentence of death, to the blessed enjoyment of eternal life.

This is so evidently the tenor of the whole New Testament, that no one could ever have entertained the least doubt on the subject, but for the seeming difficulty of reconciling some part or other of it to his own apprehensions and notions ; which surely, in a matter so far above our reach, we have little cause to trust to, against the express declarations of him who knows all things. It implies no absurdity in the least. Guilty persons cannot claim forgiveness, nor innocent persons everlasting happiness, as matter of right, but of mercy and favour only. Now God is not less merciful and favourable to his creatures, if he provides on purpose a particular method for bestowing these blessings on them, than if he did it without such a provision. Nay, indeed, more mercy is shewn in making such a provision, when it is wanted, than could be shewn were the case better. The goodness of God appears eminently, in proposing and accepting, what nothing but goodness could induce him to propose and accept : the goodness of our blessed Lord appears equally in executing the gracious design by such condescensions, as we read in the gospels, particularly

of this week ; and the goodness of the Divine Spirit, in applying the whole, by his inward operations, for the benefit of our souls. That one person should undergo pains and hardships for the sake of others, and a good person suffer many things to prevent the misery and promote the happiness of bad ones, is so common in lower instances, that though we could not have expected, we may well believe, this high degree of God's love towards us, *that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us* *. We see not indeed fully how his death produces our salvation ; nor do many people ever know how the steps taken by their friends, for their pardon or advancement, proved effectual ; yet they are not the less effectual on that account. But thus much, however, we see daily, that, from regard to the services, and sufferings, and intercessions of some persons, others have favours done them, very wisely and justly, which else neither wisdom nor justice would have permitted. And why then should it not be a fit recompence to our blessed Lord (as undoubtedly it must be the most acceptable one possible), for what he so cheerfully undertook and went through, that mankind, to whom he had made himself related, in so extraordinary a manner, with so amiable an intention, should be treated the more kindly on his account : that, to speak in the language of the prophet †, *when he had made himself an offering for sin, he should see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied, by the knowledge of himself justifying many* ? For observe, no one will ever be accounted righteous for his sake, who doth not in fact become righteous by his means. And rewarding his incarnation and death, by putting sinners into his hands to be made happy, on condition that he should first make them holy, pious and virtuous, doth no less honour to the justice of God than to his mercy.

And how little soever we apprehend the reasons of what Heaven hath done towards our deliverance, yet, as we must perceive the fitness of all that we are to contribute towards it, repentance, faith and obedience, we know very fully as much as we need. They, who never heard of the interposition of Christ, may possibly receive some benefit from it, on a general application, that God will be merciful to them in
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* Rom. v. 8.

† Isa. liii. 10, 11.

such manner as he shall think proper. But of us will be required an explicit petition, for that mercy which he hath offered in that form which he hath directed. And if, instead of this, we will rest our cause solely on the footing of our own righteousness, or our own repentance, imperfect as we know, or easily may know, they both are: if we refuse to acknowledge that efficacy in the death of our blessed Saviour, which he and his apostles have ascribed to it; from what cause soever this proceeds, other than excusable mistake; whether from a slight opinion of the desert of sin, from a high notion of human virtue, from unwillingness to confess obligations, or from the mere pride of these poor shallow understandings of ours, claiming to know every reason that God hath for his actions, while yet we know completely no one thing around us; it is a presumptuous neglect, full of guilt. And one motive for making our salvation dependent on another, and the manner of his obtaining it for us incomprehensible to ourselves, might well be, to check that swelling vanity of our hearts, which is the parent of almost all our sin and misery, and to teach man *to walk humbly with his God**.

Let us therefore thankfully accept his mercy, just as we find it offered to us; and learn to own, that we *have all sinned, and come short of the glory of God; and are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ; whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness; that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus*†.

* Mic. vi. 8.

† Rom. iii. 23—26.

S E R M O N CV.

THE FATAL CONSEQUENCES OF A PARTIAL OBEDIENCE TO
THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD.

JAMES ii. 10.

For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.

FEW persons, I apprehend, have either read or heard these words, without being in some degree shocked at them, and looking upon them as *a very hard saying* *. For though, from reverence to scripture, we may endeavour to keep down what rises in our minds, yet no wonder if we feel a strong reluctance to believing, that he who transgresses in some things, is guilty of others, in which he doth not transgress; and so by running into one extreme, becomes chargeable with the opposite; which, it must be owned, this passage, upon the first view of it, appears to affirm. But then we ought to remember, that in all discourses, upon all subjects, many things occur, which are by no means to be understood according to the mere sound of the words, but according to the nature of the matter in question, the visible intention of the writer or speaker, and the use of the language. And more especially short sentences and maxims, whether of religion, morals, or prudence, ought to have this allowance made to them; because they are often purposely conceived in terms, the obvious meaning of which alarms men; that so their attention may be excited more effectually to that hidden wisdom, which, on farther inquiry, it will be found they convey. Now the assertion before us is a Jewish maxim, found in several of their

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* John vi. 60.

ancient books, written since the times of the apostles, and therefore probably enough used before their time, when a controversy amongst them, of which we have footsteps in the gospels, might easily furnish an occasion for it.

They had a law, of which the precepts, adding the ceremonial to the moral, were very numerous. The observation of all these, though adapted with great wisdom to the circumstances in which they were placed for many ages, was found very burdensome: and therefore some of them had begun to persuade themselves, and teach others, that a strict obedience to whichever part they pleased was sufficient; or, to express it in their own words, that *God gave so many commandments to them, that by doing any of them they might be saved**; by which they meant at least any great one; and hence, in all likelihood, arose the question, *Which was the great commandment in the law†*? A doctrine of so pernicious consequence as this, we may be sure, while there was any regard to truth left, would be strenuously opposed. And it was natural, that the contrary doctrine should be expressed by the teachers of it, in the strongest manner they could well invent. Now, such undoubtedly is that of the text, which may seem indeed to have overdone the matter not a little. But the limitations belonging to it were probably well understood by every body then. And therefore all that St. James needed, in writing to the Jewish Christians of those days, was to confirm it by the sanction of his authority; though in our times it is requisite to explain, and guard it against mistakes; which also he hath greatly assisted us in doing.

For, that he never designed in the least to affirm, that being guilty of one sin would make mens condition as bad as being guilty of ever so many, we may be very sure; not only from the monstrous unreasonableness of such a notion, and
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* Pocock on Mos. xiv. 2. from Ikharim, l. 3. c. 29. In hunc ordinem recipiunt quemvis antiqui, qui ob unicum tantummodo præsitum præceptum, non rejiciens interim cætera, sed ea approbans, meretur nomen Israelitæ. *M. en. ben. Jfr. de Resur. l. 2. c. 8. p. 181.* But then he saith, l. 1. c. 6. p. 43, 44. that the Ancients held they were first to suffer for their bad deeds, then to be rewarded for their good deeds; but still all Israelites were to be finally happy, unless they disbelieved Providence, the Law, or the Resurrection.

† Matt. xxii. 36.

its inconsistency with what the other parts of scripture hath expressly taught, but from hence also, that were this the case, all sinners whatever must receive an equal condemnation; and yet he himself, in the very first of the next chapter, speaks of some that *shall receive a greater condemnation*. Since therefore this could not be his meaning, let us proceed

I. To consider what it was, or might be.

II. To draw suitable inferences from it.

I. To consider what it was, or justly might be.

And here, *offending in one point* must of necessity signify offending wilfully; for through ignorance, inadvertence, or surprise, *we all offend in many things*, as this very epistle tells us*; yet we cannot think the text was intended to bring every person under the guilt which it mentions: and therefore we are not to understand it of such offences, but of presumptuous and habitual sins, that whoever breaks the law *in one point is guilty of all*.

Again, *offending in one point* may mean either offending in some one of singular importance, or in any one, great or small. There have been persons, who, taking it in the former sense, have understood the one point to be that of mutual love, which St. James just before†, as well as St. Paul‡, says *is the fulfilling of the law*. And as the whole law of social life is *briefly comprehended in this saying, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*§, he, who offends in that one, will certainly be guilty of all, since all depend on that||: and however strictly the outward acts of each may be performed, the inward spirit of them cannot be preserved. But if it be thought rather, that *offending in any one point* whatever was meant by St. James, then we must inquire somewhat farther, to know what the last words, *guilty of all*, can signify. They certainly carry an appearance of astonishing severity; and yet there is no necessity of understanding them to be any thing more than a strong expression (for all the eastern people expressed things very strongly), importing, that whoever is thus

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blameable,

* James iii. 2. † Ver. 8. ‡ Rom. xiii. 10. § Ver. 9.

|| Merito sit omnium reus, qui contra illam [Charitatem] facit, ex qua pendent omnia. *Aug. ad Hieron.* See also the Life of St. Erkenwald, in the Appendix to Dugdale's History of St. Paul's, p. 3.

blameable, is greatly blameable, and liable to a heavy punishment. There is one passage in *St. Matthew* particularly, which will shew this in a clear light; I mean that, where our Saviour tells the Jews, that *on them should come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, the son of Barachias, whom they slew between the temple and the altar.* Nor was he content with saying so once, but repeats it immediately, *Verily I say unto you, all these things shall come upon this generation* *. What could he possibly mean here? Not literally, that any of the Jews should be punished on account of the murder of *Abel*, for they did not so much as descend from his murderer; nor that any of that generation should undergo the sentence of God for what another generation did; but, as their wickedness, especially in persecuting him and his disciples, was, and he foresaw would be, incredibly great, he designed to say, in the most forcible manner, that their punishment should be so too. And to raise, if possible, their conceptions of it high enough, he purposely uses terms, which, if taken strictly, would be too high; and speaks, as if every innocent man, that had ever been put to death, should have his blood required at their hands. Nor did he alone venture on such forms of speech. *St. John* hath exactly the same, where he saith, that *in Babylon was found the blood of all that were slain upon the earth* †. This may seem to us taking a strange liberty, but it was familiar to the Jews; their own writers since are full of it; and abound in sayings, which they intend only for bold figures, and the ignorant mistake for gross absurdities. Indeed all languages have more or less in them of this kind; only we overlook it in our own, while we are shocked at it in others. To say, that a man hath done all the mischief, or suffered all the misery in the world, is so common a way of speaking, that perhaps we shall be surpris'd, upon recollection, to find it quite as strong as the before-mentioned ones out of scripture. Just in the same manner, then, as the Jews of that one age were to bear the punishment of all the righteous blood, that had been shed in all ages, the wilful breakers of one commandment incur the guilt of breaking

* Matt. xxiii. 35, 36.

† Rev. xviii. 24.

breaking all the commandments ; that is, their crime is very great, and their condemnation shall be in proportion. For they who offend but against a single precept, yet if they do it deliberately and habitually, which, you have seen, is the case here supposed, are doubtless faulty to a much greater degree, than such as offend against more, but less frequently, and without design.

Had therefore the words of the text been true only in this looser sense, they had still, considering the genius of the eastern stile, been very justifiable. But indeed there is much further truth in them. For *guilty of*, may mean liable to ; the scripture saith, *guilty of death* *, as well as of sin ; and then, *guilty of all*, may mean, liable to all the punishments denounced by the law, in his proper degree. Or though we suppose the phrase to signify, as it seems to do, guilty of breaking all the precepts of the law, still, when any person presumptuously transgresses one part, his guilt in some measure extends to the whole. For the whole of God's law is but one system, and every part of it connected with every other ; so that, if any is broken, all are weakened. The whole of piety and virtue is but one disposition of mind, one uniform principle of doing what is fit ; and if what is unfit may ever be done, there can be no reason assigned why it may not always be done †. Further yet : The lawgiver's title to command, from which the law derives its whole force, this too is one and the same throughout ; and if he hath not a right to be obeyed in every article, he hath no right to be obeyed at all. The observation that follows in the verse after the text, is perfectly just : *he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill* : nor is there a higher regard due to him in one case than in the other. Whoever therefore denies the obligation of any precept, which he admits to be a precept, disowns the whole authority of God at once ; for he hath not a jot more in the rest than he hath in this, where he

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* Matt. xxvi. 66.

† The simile of Max. Tyr. Diff. 31. § 2. Edit. 1740, though applied somewhat differently by him, is applicable to this purpose also. *Ὡςπερ γὰρ ἐν ταῖς τῶν μέλων ἀρμονίαις, τὸ παραλείφειν, ἢ ἂν μικρὸν ἢ, διαλύει τὸν κόσμον τῷ μέλει, ὅτω καὶ ἐν τῇ τῷ βίῃ ἀρμονίᾳ, κτλ.*

is allowed none *. Or, if a person only refuses to obey a commandment, which he thinks is not one, yet, if his thinking so proceeds from his unwillingness to think otherwise, it may be a near approach to the same guilt; for, at this rate, he may reject them all, if he dislikes them all. Nay, supposing he doth not set himself to disbelieve his duty, but is prevailed on by temptation to neglect some part, yet then, he not only might, with just as good reason, neglect every part; but probably it is from no principle of conscience that he performs any. Attention to his interest, or want of inclination, may keep him good in most cases besides; but if the fear of God, or love of virtue, were what kept him so, one should think it would have kept him from one sin as well as from another. And therefore he that violates any divine command, it may be feared is guilty in the rest, which he observes, of not observing them on such grounds as he should; which, to the purposes of religion and his own future happiness, is too near a-kin to not observing them at all. For if an action, which would otherwise be a good one, is done from a motive that hath no good in it, this cannot be the service that God requires. And on some of these accounts perhaps it is, that *Tully* affirms, in words pretty much like those of the text, that whoever is destitute of any one virtue, is possessed of none †.

But I would not be quite so rigid neither. There are doubtless but too many inconsistent persons, much to be pitied, and often in several particulars to be esteemed, that shew a true and great regard to their duty in some things, while in others they are enticed to act very ill. These now are not the most highly faulty, but still really faulty, with respect to the whole of God's law. In those branches which they transgress, there can be no question of their guilt; and in those which they observe, they are guilty at least of laying in their own

* The Talmudists observe this particularly concerning a denial of the sabbath. כֹּלֵה חַתּוּרָה הַכּוֹפֵר בַּשַּׁבָּת כְּאִילוּ בּוֹפֵר בְּכָל *Aben Ezra* gives the reason: For he denies the creation. *Seld. de Jure Nat. & Gent.* l. 3. c. 10.

† *Ecquid scis igitur—virtutem—si unam confessus sis te non habere, nullam esse te habiturum?* *Tusc. Disp. lib. 2. § 13. Edit. Davies.* Where see other authorities in the notes. See also *De Fin.* 5—23.

own way grievous temptations to transgress them. For the indulgence of any sin strangely leads men at all times, and almost forces them at some times, into the commission of many more, which possibly they little thought of; till at the breach, which appeared small and harmless, there rushes in a torrent, that overwhelms every thing right in them; and thus, by *offending in one point*, they too frequently become, in the strictest sense, *guilty of all**. Their guilt indeed, as to these latter sins, is not complete, till they have committed them; but it began, when they brought themselves first into the hazard of committing them. And even should they be so happy as to escape, running into danger is no small misbehaviour.

Another fault of theirs, with respect to such parts of God's law as they do not personally break, is, that their example of offending in some points, encourages the world around them to offend in other points. For if you indulge the vice which you like, why may not they indulge the vices they like? And thus, though you are guilty of practising but one sin, you are guilty of promoting the practice of every sin; and will share in the crime, and consequently in the punishment, not only of what you directly do, but perhaps of what you abhor, because you have been the occasion of others doing it.

But there is still a sense left, and a very interesting one, in which the words of St. *James* are true; *the royal law*, that he mentions just before the text, and refers to in it, is plainly the law of the kingdom of Christ, that is, the gospel. Now, the gospel terms of salvation are, that whoever sincerely, though imperfectly, observes the whole of its precepts, is entitled, through faith, to its forgiveness and rewards: but if a person is wilfully guilty of any one sin, so long as he continues in that state, *Christ shall profit him nothing*†. For, even supposing him pardoned before, that pardon was but a conditional one, and cannot become absolute, till the time of his trial is over. Every presumptuous transgression opens the account anew, which repentance and amendment had closed; and

* Si fatereris scieris januam incendisse, si unum tignum, puto, tota domus intelligeretur ex parte. Nec enim quisquam omnia incendit, sed unam aliquam partem, ex qua surgat in omnia se sparsurus ignis. Sen. Excerpt. Declam. lib. 5. Controv. 5.

† Gal. iii. 2.

and makes him a debtor once again for every thing that he hath ever done amiss. Read but the parable of the unmerciful servant, in the 18th chapter of *St. Matthew*, and you will be perfectly satisfied of this truth. Indeed the very reason of the thing shews, that whoever performs not all the conditions of the Christian covenant, is entitled to none of the benefits of it: but though his case shall doubtless be equitably considered, and with due allowances to his former virtue or penitence, yet it shall not be considered as coming under the promises of the gospel; but he remains chargeable, though not with any thing he hath not done, yet with every thing he hath done. And which of God's commandments is there, that we have not, at some time, in some degree, wilfully transgressed? This therefore is a very important sense, were there no other, in which he, who offends in one point, is guilty of all.

You see then how entirely justifiable this passage of *St. James* appears, when well examined. And the chief things to be remembered concerning it are these. He doth not mean, that committing one sin makes our condition just as bad as committing ever so many. But he may reasonably mean, that being vicious in any respect, weakens and endangers our virtue in every respect; that deliberately breaking God's law, but in one case, implies in it a denial of his authority in all cases; and not only, in just consequence, may, but daily, in fact, doth produce an universal disregard to him, both in ourselves and others; nay, supposing the mischief to stop far short of this, yet that a failure in any single condition of the gospel covenant precludes us from all the rewards, and in a degree proportioned to the greatness of the failure, will bring upon us all the threatenings of it. Let us therefore now consider,

II. The inferences to be drawn from the words thus explained; which are two.

1. Since it is neither affirmed by *St. James*, nor true in itself, that the guilt of any one sin is equal to the guilt of ever so great a multitude of sins, there can be no encouragement in the world for the wicked to run on in still more wickedness; but, on the contrary, next to becoming uniformly good, their most serious interest lies in lessening the number and measure of the things in which they are bad. Too commonly,

ly, when once they are fallen into the practice of a sin, either it requires another to conceal or support it, or a second inclination claims the same right to indulgence as the first, or uneasy reflections drive them to seek for consolation from irreligious principles, or loss of reputation amongst the virtuous, reduces them to court acceptance, at any rate they can have it, among the vicious. And though they are sensible that all this plunges them deeper, yet their reasoning is, that any one sin, if the scripture be true, makes their case desperate, and ever so many can do no more; that, if they are to be miserable hereafter, whoever ventures upon the thing, it is arrant absurdity in him to be solicitous about the degree of it, and live in a state of perpetual inconsistency, neither hoping at all for the rewards of virtue, nor enjoying freely the pleasures of vice. Now, undeniably this sort of conduct is a folly, and there is only one sort greater; but that is the very one, of which you make choice; resolving to do amiss in more points, because you do amiss in some; and to make your condition as much worse as you can, because it is a very bad one already. If the misery, which God will inflict hereafter, is to be feared, surely an increase of it is, exactly in proportion, so much more to be feared; and, in such a case as this, a large increase must be expected. There may be excuses pleaded for falling into some faults, but there can be no excuse for adding others to them wilfully. There may be hope of amendment, while you are gone but a little wrong; and perhaps you please yourself with the thought that you shall amend; at least the time may come, when that prospect, if you could entertain it, would be a pleasing one indeed. Why then, in the mean while, will you be needlessly deviating farther and farther; and laying daily new obstacles (some of which may prove insuperable), in the way of your own return? Possibly, indeed, you may utterly despise such considerations as these, and think it great bravery to do so; but it is an unwise bravery. You are not certain, you cannot be certain, that either immorality, or contempt of religion, are safe things: and if they are unsafe, the less you are guilty of either the better. Were a future account only possible, it ought to put you under no small restraints; but how much greater, if it be probable, if it be certain? It is very true,

the only behaviour that will secure you thoroughly, is keeping clear of every thing bad; but at least do not go lengths to which you are not tempted; do not go every length to which you are tempted. If you will be debauched, why will you be injurious too? If you will be both dissolute and dishonest, why need you be profane also, and scorn and ridicule virtue and piety, as well as neglect them? Or, on the other hand, however you act in relation to things of the next world, why should you abandon yourself to profligateness and folly in respect of this, and be wretched before your time? Fear not in the least, but there will be guilt and mischief full enough in those kinds and degrees of sin, from which you imagine you cannot abstain; so that you will have no occasion to increase the list of them wantonly. And be assured, that however painful it may be to retreat, or stop short where you are, going farther on will be much more so, probably in this life, but assuredly hereafter. For if God will at all distinguish then between good and bad (as he must and will, if he be just, or wise, or true), he will as certainly distinguish, and to purpose too, between bad and worse.

But absurd as it would be to reckon one sin as dangerous as many (against which, notwithstanding, it was needful to give a strong caution, because the text, at first sight, may appear to favour it), still the opposite error is equally absurd, which yet, in spite of the text, the whole scripture, and the plainest dictates of common reason, great multitudes will persist in; that, I mean, of thinking or acting, as if they thought, that since every one is peculiarly inclined to some fault or other, he will be dispensed with in that, provided he performs but the rest of his duty tolerably well. And therefore,

2. The principal inference to be drawn from St. James's words, is, that no one sin whatever can be wilfully indulged, without forfeiting our salvation. Indeed if it could; if our obedience may safely fail just where alone it is, properly speaking, tried; that is, where we find ourselves peculiarly tempted to disobey; what proof do we give of any regard to virtue, or what must become of the interests of it in the world? Few people have above one or two faults to which they are much addicted; so that allowing them these, is allowing them all; and giving them leave to be as wicked as they

they want to be. Or supposing they have several bad inclinations ; yet, if one of them is to be forgiven, because it is a favourite, why not the rest, if they can make the same plea ? And further, if your faults are to be overlooked in the day of judgment, why not the different faults of every one else ? One person is prone to intemperance, another to lewdness, a third to falsehood and dishonesty, a fourth to malice and revenge. If inclination, and constitution, and what we are pleased to call nature, is to be a warrant for any of these, why not for all ? But you will plead it perhaps only for small sins. And so one is indulged first, because it is a little one ; then another, because it is not much bigger ; and where shall we stop, or in what will this end ? Every one's sin is small in his own opinion, and none is so in reality. For, be it in what instance it will, disobeying our Maker, violating our consciences, and breaking through the sacred bonds of truth and duty, can never be deemed a slight matter, nor will it hereafter be found so.

But is there no allowance then to be made for human weakness, and the strength of temptation ? Undoubtedly great allowance, in all such failings as we watch, and strive, and pray against, and persevere in opposing : but then, whoever doth this in earnest, will certainly gain ground of his failings ; and therefore whoever gains little or no ground, doth not do it in earnest. Wishing now and then that we were better ; being grieved a little when we think how bad we are ; and, in a sudden fit of goodness, making a faint essay towards reformation, and laying it aside again ; this is far from performing what, by the assistance of Heaven, we might, if we would. And whoever can think that no more is expected of him, must think at the same time, that God hath very little attention to the observance of his laws, and that his laws are of very little use towards the government of the world.

All persons therefore, who have a proper regard to some branches of their duty, but not to others, ought seriously to consider, that they are doing a great deal, without doing any thing to effect, for want of doing the whole ; that it must be peculiarly grievous to them in the next life, to come so near the kingdom of heaven, and yet to fall short of it ; to be *al-*

most, but not *altogether Christians* *. Since they take pains to correct part of their bad inclinations, it cannot but be worth their while to correct the rest. Either it will not be very difficult, or the difficulty will not continue very long, or the reward will be very ample. And whichsoever is the case, it must evidently be their interest to make their lives easy, by *walking in every ordinance of the Lord blameless* †; for *so shall we not be confounded, if we have respect unto all his commandments* ‡.

But then we must ever understand this, not only of moral duties, not only of the duties of natural religion, but of revealed also; and particularly of that great and leading commandment, *that we believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ* §; believe in him practically, as well as speculatively; believe in him as our Redeemer and Mediator, no less than our instructor; trusting in his merits for pardon and acceptance; in his grace for strength and comfort; and seeking to *be found in him, not having our own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is of God by faith* ||. For we have all offended in every point; and having recourse to this one, of penitent faith in Christ, working by love, is our only cure for past sins, our only means of future obedience. *By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified* ¶; but *whosoever believeth in him, shall not be ashamed* **.

* Acts xxvi. 28, 29.

† Luke i. 6.

‡ Psal cxxix. 6. § 1 John iii. 23.

§ Phil. iii. 9.

¶ Rom. iii. 20.

** Rom. x. 11.

S E R M O N C V I.

THE JUST ESTIMATE OF THE SHORTNESS OF HUMAN LIFE,
AND OUR PROPER EMPLOYMENT HERE.

PSALM XC. 12.

*So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts
unto wisdom.*

THERE are not many subjects recommended so often from the pulpit to your serious consideration, as the shortness and uncertainty of human life: indeed there are very few that deserve it so well. For our business is, not to entertain the curiosity of our hearers with learned discoveries, refined speculations, or uncommon remarks, but to remind them continually of such truths as are most useful to direct their practice, by mending their hearts. And how impossible soever it may appear, that any one should be ignorant of some of them, yet if men will forget or neglect them, and live as if they knew them not, they must be still repeated and inculcated. The wisdom of our gracious Maker hath provided, that the greatest part, not only of our duties, but of the motives to perform them, shall naturally and frequently suggest themselves to our minds. And amongst the latter, one should think there was none more obvious, more unavoidable, than the consideration of our own mortality. But as those objects, which are continually present to our senses, are apt, for that reason, scarcely to affect us more than if they were absent; so this truth, being familiarized to us by daily examples, about which we are indifferent, makes almost as little impression upon us as if the case were otherwise. It is a fact, which we have no doubt of, and no pleasure in; we therefore turn our thoughts to somewhat else, with such unhappy success,

success, that, though the consequences of it are the most interesting to us all, that possibly can be, multitudes of us live, as if we neither believed nor suspected any thing of the matter. When indeed the voice of exhortation, or the unexpected decease of a friend or acquaintance, forces us to attend, we acknowledge, for that moment, and perhaps with some concern, that we must expect to die soon; but quickly proceed again to act, as if we hoped to live for ever. And therefore it was a wise prayer of *Moses*, that God would condescend to help our infirmity in this important point. *So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.* Or, as the words may be translated, without any material change in the sense: *Teach us to number our days thus; to count them, as the preceding part of the psalm had done, like the sleep of a night, like the grass, which in the morning flourisheth, but by the evening is cut down and withered: or again, Teach us to number our days aright; and we will bring, that is, in order to learn, or, we shall acquire, an heart of wisdom.*

The expression of *numbering our days*, carries in it an implication that they are not many. For in scripture, as being *without number* denotes a large multitude*, so the contrary phrase hath of course the contrary signification. Thus, when *Moses* mentions the continuance of the cloud only a few days upon the tabernacle, it is in the Hebrew *days of number*†. When he threatens, *The Lord shall scatter you amongst the nations, and ye shall be left few in number*, it is again only *men of number*‡. And when *Belshazzar* is told, that *God hath numbered his kingdom*, the meaning is, that its conclusion was near at hand§. Yet we cannot say, that life is too short for us to enjoy the proper happiness of it. For in our present fallen condition, all things considered, we have much reason to be contented, nay thankful, that the duration of man upon earth is no longer; and should have sufficient cause to be weary of it if it were. For surely *threescore years and ten* is full space enough to be spectators of, and sharers in, the follies, the sins, the sufferings, of such a world as this. And both

Gen. xli. 49. Numb. xxiii. 10. Judges vi. 5. vii. 12. 1 Kings iii. 3. Job v. 9. ix. 10. xxxiv. 24. Eccl. i. 15.

† Numb. ix. 20.

‡ Deut. iv. 27.

§ Dan. v. 26.

both they who are *so strong that they come to fourscore years*, experience a peculiar degree of *labour and sorrow**: and they that, after *walking with God, are taken by him* † ever so early, ought to be considered as *taken away in mercy from evil* ‡ of one kind or another. Nor is life too short for the business we have to do in it. For God requires, in this and all respects, only in proportion to what he gives. And we should every one of us easily do the whole that is needful here, would we but reflect what it is, and set about it in earnest; which they that will not, when the hours allotted them are so few, would be less likely still, if they had more to trifle away. But there yet remains a sense, in which we all feel and own the shortness of life, when it is too late, if not before; that is, we find it waste much quicker than we imagined; not only because we seldom attain to live near so many years as we flatter ourselves, but because the utmost extent to which we can live, doth not allow such a multitude of things to be done in it, as some fancy and imprudently attempt, nor afford room for such waste and negligence, or such a series of errors and wrong steps, as others adventure upon. And this being so evident and interesting a truth, the serious and frequent consideration of what it forbids, and what it calls for, must powerfully contribute to produce both a temper and a conduct of true wisdom.

But to this end, we should place before our eyes two distinct views of our existence here: as it regards the present world, and as it is also a state of preparation for a future. At present I shall dwell chiefly on the former view; which, though it be a very confined and imperfect one, yet was of so great use to the good and virtuous under the Old Testament, when the world to come was less clearly revealed, that it ought not to be slighted now. And it visibly hath this advantage, that whatever is rightly inferred from it, must be universally confessed; because, let men bring themselves to think ever so little, or doubt ever so much, concerning the next life, they cannot doubt, but that which now is, will soon, and they know not how soon, come to its conclusion; from which truth alone, if they reflect on it duly, they will
not

* Ps. xc. 10.

† Gen. v. 24.

‡ Is. lvii. 1.

not fail to learn important lessons of moral, and even pious (which will thus appear to be wise) behaviour. *As of the green leaves on a thick tree, saith the son of Sirach, some fall and some grow, so is the generation of flesh and blood: One cometh to an end, and another is born. Every work rotteth and consumeth away, and the worker thereof shall go withal. Blessed is the man that doth meditate good things in wisdom, and that reasoneth of holy things by his understanding*.*

1. First then, as all virtues in general, both by their own proper influence, and the blessing of God, which reason leads us to expect, and scripture expressly assures us of, conduce to prolong our days, the consideration of their natural brevity may well direct us to a virtuous conduct; particularly to sobriety, temperance, and chastity; to a prudent moderation of anger; and to whatever duties have especially the promise or the prospect of long life annexed to them. For nothing can be more absurd, than to contract into a yet narrower compass what is so far from needing it; unless it be complaining against Providence, that human life is of so small continuance, when ours might be of much greater, if we would; nay, when perhaps, at the very moment of our complaint, we are taking all the pains we can, not to live out one half of the few days that are appointed to man upon earth; and, in those we do live, to make ourselves miserable and fit for nothing; hastening old age before its season, and loading it with diseases, by an idle, luxurious, and libertine youth.

2. Since we have but a small time to stay here, it is our wisdom to make it as easy and agreeable to ourselves, and all with whom we have any intercourse, as we are able; and to imitate persons of prudence, who occasionally go journies together; bearing with each others temper and behaviour; giving mutual comfort and assistance under the misfortunes and inconveniences of the way; and continually endeavouring to preserve or restore the good humour and cheerfulness of the company. By this method, we might live much more in a few years, that is, have a greater feeling of the blessings of life, than by being reciprocally troublesome and vexatious, we can in ever so many. And surely it is very strange, that
having

* Eccclus. xiv. 18, 19, 20.

having so scanty a share of being allotted us here, and this exposed by nature to such multitudes of unavoidable troubles and sufferings, we should contrive to pour additional bitterness into our common cup, by needless injuries and provocations. At best we have no happiness to spare; and therefore should rather study to increase our portion, by friendliness and kind offices, which will of course invite a return of them, than lessen it by selfishness, haughtiness, resentment, perverseness, unseasonable intermeddling; qualities, most of them uneasy in themselves, and all of them productive of numberless uneasinesses with every body around us. Or how little soever we may regard our own tranquillity, or how well soever we may hope to maintain it, in the midst of disputes and contentions; yet, as most persons are differently affected by such things, surely the condition of humanity in general ought to move compassion in us; and we should permit the little which our poor fellow-creatures enjoy of good, to be enjoyed, while it lasts, in peace. We might image to ourselves, methinks, those who suffer by us, complaining and pleading, in language like that of Job: *Man that is born of a woman, is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not. And dost thou open thine eyes upon such an one, and bringest me into judgment with thee? Seeing his days are determined, his bounds appointed, that he cannot pass; turn from him, that he may rest, till he shall accomplish, as an hireling, his day*. Are not my days few? Cease then, and let me alone, that I may take comfort a little, before I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness, and the shadow of death†.*

3. The shortness of life should teach us to be speedy and diligent in doing all such things as we ought to do. What these are indeed, it doth not alone sufficiently shew. But they are most of them so plain, and the rest so constantly taught us, that almost every one designs to practise them sooner or later, and become extremely good before he dies. But then they perpetually defer and postpone the time of beginning this reformation, on frivolous pretences; and never consider to any effect, how their life is passing away, and

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gliding

* Job xiv. 1, 2, 3, 5, 6.

† Job x. 20, 21

gliding from under them, in a course of actions, which they own is faulty, and will at last lament in vain. They think they may throw away a great deal of it, and have plenty left, to act as they judge proper afterwards. Now, were it to last ever so long, yet spending any part of it amiss, either wilfully or thoughtlessly, would be very unwise. But considering how short both others, and we ourselves, as far as our experience reaches, have always found it; to squander what with our best management is but enough, and what possibly may not hold out another day, is folly beyond expression. Therefore the son of *Sirach*, concerning one part of our duty, acts of kindness, advises thus *: *Remember that death will not be long in coming; and that the covenant of the grave is not shewed unto thee. Do good unto thy friend before thou die, and according to thy ability stretch out thy hand, and give him.* But long before that, *Solomon* had established the same rule, on the same foundation, concerning all other parts: *Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest* †. If then we are guilty of any sin, or liable to any smaller blemish, let us instantly amend, lest we should never have an opportunity; or at best should leave a doubt, whether we forsook our faults, or they forsook us. If there should be any valuable quality that we want, and should reckon ourselves happy in the possession of, let us acquire it as soon as possible, and have the longest enjoyment of it that we are able. Whatever we see would be right and fit for us to do; whatever we should be unwilling to go out of the world and leave undone, let us take the only way to make sure of doing, by doing it without delay. Every friendly care, every useful labour, every act, by which we can either provide properly for those who immediately belong to us, or benefit any other of our fellow-creatures, let us apply it directly; *and work the works of him that sent us, while it is day; for the night cometh, when no man can work* ‡.

4. Another point of wisdom, which the shortness and precariousness of our present state of being should teach us, is to avoid long pursuits of worldly profits or pre-eminences; which
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* Eccclus. xiv. 12, 13.

† Eccl. ix. 10.

‡ John ix. 4.

probably either we shall not have time to attain, or must soon quit. Indeed, were the extent of man's life ever so great, it would be but a poor employment of it to fix our hearts on gaining more wealth, more power and influence, or higher rank, than would do us good; to neglect worthier attentions, and disquiet ourselves and our neighbours with these. But for a creature, whose days *fly away as a dream when one awaketh* *, to have an endless train of selfish designs, and schemes laid up for many years, when perhaps *this night his soul may be required of him* †, is monstrously unfuitable. And yet, I know not how it is, the nearer people are to their end, the more eager they commonly are to get what they, of all the world, have the least occasion for, and the least excuse for being solicitous about; and instead of that ease and repose, which their time of day calls for, unnaturally force themselves to labour and fatigue of body and mind, when they can ill support either; till, in the midst of this preposterous vehemence and bustle, they are swept on a sudden into another state, with heads and hearts full of nothing but this. But though the absurdity of such immoderate attachments is most palpable, when persons are upon the verge of life; yet, in every part of it, the imprudence of forming distant expectations and designs, and having no reasonable prospect of their accomplishment, or at least of benefit from them, is both very real and too frequent. We have all a great deal to do in amending our ways, and rectifying our tempers, on which our happiness even here depends, and we scarce ever think of it; whereas we need but a very small share of temporal advantages to carry us on comfortably to our journey's end, and yet we set our minds almost wholly on increasing it; many by injustice, others by hard-hearted penuriousness, or sinfully anxious care; the former unmindful of the prophet's warning, *He that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them, perhaps in the middle of his days; and, whenever he leaves them, at his end shall be a fool* ‡: the latter, equally regardless of the Psalmist's beautiful reflection: *Behold thou hast made my days as it were a span long, and mine age is even as nothing before thee: and verily every man living is altogether*

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* Job xx. 8. Ps. lxxiii. 20.

† Luke xii. 20.

‡ Jer. xvii. 11.

ther vanity. Man walketh in a vain shew, and disquieteth himself in vain; he heapeth up riches, and cannot tell who shall gather them *. Reasonable industry, to procure what is requisite for us in our station, and for those with whom we are entrusted, far from being blameable, is a duty. But when they, who have no families, are as earnest in hoarding, as if they had ever so large ones, only to dispose of their wealth, they hardly know or care to whom, and sometimes have not the heart to dispose of it at all: or when they, who *have* families, make it their business to scrape together for them what will probably do them no real service, but only be a *temptation and a snare* † to them; when they grudge to relieve the necessitous and miserable, can think of nothing with pleasure, but accumulating still more, and are unable to say themselves how much they would have: such a temper and behaviour is utterly unfit for so short-lived and frail a being as man. *Having therefore food and raiment, that is, a competent provision of necessities for ourselves and ours, let us be therewith content: for we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out* ‡.

5. A fifth use of numbering our days is, to check and compose all strong emotions of mind about worldly concerns; for in so transitory a state there can be nothing to deserve them. Why should we be elated with hope of future good, when both our own lives, and those on whom our expectations may depend, are subject to such innumerable chances; and the higher we raise ourselves in imagination, the more afflicting will be our fall? *Put not your trust, saith the Psalmist, in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish* §. *Cease ye from man, saith the prophet, whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of* ||? Why again should we be dejected with fear of future evils, when a thousand accidents, which none of us can guess at beforehand, may prevent their coming; or, if they do come, our head may be laid low enough before that time, and far enough out of the way of feeling them; or, even if they should light up-
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* Ps. xxxix. 5, 6.

† 1 Tim. vi. 9.

‡ 1 Tim. vi. 7, 8.

§ Ps. cxlvi. 3, 4.

|| Is. ii. 22.

on us, a short life hath no room in it for long sufferings? If we are visited with tormenting or wearisome diseases, the harder they press us, the more speedily, for the most part, they will work our deliverance, and bring us to that place, where *there shall be no sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain* *. If we lose our best friends, it was at most but a very few years that we could have enjoyed them. If we suffer vexations from our enemies, crosses in our affairs, all will soon be over, and we shall be securely situated, *where the wicked shall cease from troubling, and where the weary shall be at rest* †. If others obtain the honours, the profits, the gratifications, we wished for, there is little cause to envy them so perishable a distinction. If we obtain them ourselves, there is as little cause for exultation or pride while we have them, or indignation or surprise, when he, who gave for a time, takes away, or permits any one else to take away, what death is hourly hastening towards us to carry off irrecoverably. The various passions belonging to our nature were interwoven in it, to set us on pursuing good and avoiding evil, where it would prove to any purpose; for which end a moderate exercise of them serves best; and the spirit of contented resignation (of which there is plainly a principle in man, if he would but use it), was appointed for our relief, and a great one we should find it, where we can relieve ourselves no other way. In so uncertain a state, vehemence of temper is sure misery, and in *patience* alone can we *possess our souls* ‡. A quiet and meek submission therefore to whatever may happen, without indulging hope or fear, joy or sorrow, anger or dissatisfaction, is evidently the frame of mind which our mortality requires. Or to express it in the words of St. Paul: *This I say, brethren, the time is short. It remaineth that they that weep be as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as though they used it not; for the fashion of this world passeth away* §.

It is true, calming our agitations by the prospect of death, may be thought by some to be curing a less evil by introducing a greater, which is left without cure. But indeed, view-

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* Rev. xxi. 4. † Job iii. 17. ‡ Luke xxi. 19. § 1 Cor. vii. 29, 30, 31.

ing it often and steadily will diminish its terrors (which, unless we look beyond it, are chiefly imaginary), as it doth those of every thing else in the world. Viewing it as the will of God, will oblige us in duty to submit to it contentedly, *remembering them that have been before us, and that come after; for this is the sentence of the Lord upon all flesh; and why are we against the pleasure of the Most High**? Then viewing it also as a relief, though not of the most desirable kind, must contribute to reconcile many to it something farther, and on the whole pretty well. For though *bitter is the remembrance of death to a man that liveth at rest, and hath prosperity in all things, yet justly acceptable is it to the needy, and to him whose strength faileth, and that is vexed with all things*†. Yet still, it must be owned, this consolation is but a melancholy one. And therefore, God be thanked, though numbers of pious men, in ancient days, had probably no very clear knowledge of any other, yet he hath enabled us, chiefly indeed by revelation, yet partly by reason itself, to see distinctly what they did not. And accordingly I must add,

Sixthly, and lastly, That the most important lesson, taught us by the shortness and uncertainty of our present life, considered in itself, is, that we may reasonably expect, and should therefore continually look forward to another. The longest term at which we can arrive here, and the utmost use we can make of it, is so very a trifle and nothing, compared with the capacity for improvement, both intellectual and moral, which we experience ourselves to have, that, according to the most probable judgment we are capable of forming, there must be somewhat farther, and unspeakably better, designed and reserved for us by our wise and bountiful Creator; some other scene of existence opened, when this is closed, in which we shall grow up to our maturity; and manifest and rejoice in those perfections of our nature, which are hid and buried at present, in all to a great degree, in some almost entirely. That a being, qualified for so much, should have space allowed it for so little, would appear an evident impropriety and disproportion; which cannot be justly charged upon any part of the works of God. And the more we consider what num-

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* Ecclus. xli. 3, 4.

† Ibid. ver. 1, 2.

bers are cut off prematurely in their tender youth, or just when their faculties are beginning to ripen; but especially, with what strange inequality, and unsuitableness to the behaviour of men, both prosperity and adversity are distributed amongst them by the confessedly unerring hand of Providence, the stronger the argument grows that this cannot be all; that the view of life, which we have been taking hitherto, is a poor and narrow one indeed; that another of infinitely greater moment is to follow it, in which every thing wanting here shall be supplied, and every thing wrong set right. But convincing and interesting as these deductions of reason are, nothing is able to *bring life and immortality into full light*, much less to assure impenitent sinners of everlasting punishment, and penitent believers of eternal rewards, but the gospel of *Jesus Christ* *. This therefore must be always the principal object of our attention: and this, through God's grace, to be obtained by its means, will teach us, what else we cannot learn effectually and practically, to think of this our mortal state, as a short and precious opportunity given us to prepare for another and an endless one; the happiness or misery of which is to depend on the affections cultivated, and the deeds done by us, while in the body. Were the life which we now live imagined to be the whole, multitudes would argue, plausibly though unjustly, that it could be no great matter how they spent it; whether they acted virtuously or viciously, discreetly or indiscreetly, since *one event happeneth to all, and the wise man dieth as the fool* †. But our share in the recompences of that which is to come, cannot possibly be regarded as a slight thing. If then we are to be blessed or wretched for ever, according as we behave well or ill in the mean while, this makes our conduct a serious point beyond expression; and draws most affecting consequences after it; such as the weakest person must see, and the most artful can raise no objection against: that the pleasures and profits of sin are never to allure us, nor the difficulties and afflictions of virtue to deter us in the least, but both in comparison to be looked on as if they were not: that the enjoyments of the present state are to be used with cautious moderation, and the burdens of it to be borne

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* 2 Tim. i. 10.

† Eccl. ii. 14, 16.

with cheerful hope: in short, that we are to *walk by faith, not by sight**; applying indeed to worldly business, as far as our stations require; and partaking of worldly comforts, as far as will excite our thankfulness to God for them, and answer the purposes intended by them; yet still setting our affections principally, not on the attainment of transitory accommodations or amusements, during our journey, but on securing, by a diligent performance of the work for which we were sent upon it, a joyful entrance into our *continuing city*†; which God of his infinite mercy grant us, through, &c.

* 2 Cor. v. 7.

† Heb. xiii. 14.

S E R M O N C V I I .

THE JUST ESTIMATE OF THE SHORTNESS OF HUMAN LIFE,
AND OUR PROPER EMPLOYMENT HERE.

PSALM XC. 12.

*So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts
unto wisdom.*

FROM these words I have proposed to treat of the wisdom, the instruction in piety and virtue, which may be learned from the shortness and uncertain duration of human life; considered,

I. With respect to the present scene of things only :

II. To that eternal one which is to follow.

Even the former of these views, though extremely and essentially imperfect, yet affords, as I have shewn you, many important lessons and directions; that by sobriety, temperance, chastity, and due government of all our passions, we should endeavour to prolong the space allowed us here; that we should use every proper method of making it as easy and comfortable to one another as we can; that we should be diligent to improve our little time to the best purposes, and do quickly what we would not leave undone; that we should proportion our desires of riches, and honours, and power, and every worldly good, to the scanty term which we have for the acquisition and enjoyment of them; that we should moderate our emotions of joy and grief, of hope, and fear, and anger; vehemence in any of them being plainly unsuitable to a condition so transitory; and lastly, that from the low attainments of our earthly state, and the short continuance and unequal distribution of its blessings, we should be raised to the belief and earnest expectation of a better.

Very different conclusions, I am sensible, and very bad ones, have been often drawn from the small number of our days ; of which, besides many instances in the looser Heathen writers, we have so distinct and beautiful an account in the second chapter of *the book of Wisdom*, that I shall repeat it, and make some remarks on it, before I go further.

*The ungodly said, reasoning with themselves, but not aright, Our life is short and tedious ; and in the death of man there is no remedy, neither was there any man known to have returned from the grave. For we are born at all adventures, and we shall be hereafter as though we had never been. Our time is a very shadow, that passeth away ; and after our end there is no returning. Come on therefore, let us enjoy the good things that are present ; and speedily use the creatures, like as in youth, Let us fill ourselves with costly wine and perfumes ; and let no flower of the spring pass by us : let us crown ourselves with rose-buds, before they be withered. Let none of us go without his part of our voluptuousness ; let us leave tokens of our joyfulness in every place ; for this is our portion, and our lot is this. Let us oppress the poor righteous man ; let us not spare the widow, nor reverence the ancient grey hairs of the aged. Let our strength be the law of justice ; for that, which is feeble, is found to be nothing worth *.*

Now, it is certainly to be expected, that if this life were to be our all, we should each make the best advantage of it that we could. But then the way to do so is a very different one from that, which *the ungodly, reasoning with themselves, but not aright*, propose. Thoughtless gaiety and dissolute pleasures, how inviting soever the description of them may sound, bring persons daily, and often with surprising suddenness, into distresses and sufferings of various kinds ; which, destroying their reputations, their fortunes, their healths, will give them much more cause to complain of the shortness, and yet tediousness of life, than they had when they first attempted to palliate this evil by such fatal remedies. For vice and folly have the unhappy secret of reconciling this seeming contradiction, by lessening the extent of our days, and at the same time increasing the burden of them.

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But supposing that such miseries could be avoided, human nature is not fitted for a perpetual hurry of amusements and extravagances ; nor, without a very painful force upon itself, can bear them ; but all excesses of this kind are severely punished, sooner or later, by that lowness and dejection, which fails not to follow wrong indulgences ; and yet more severely by that moral principle which is deeply rooted in our hearts, that voice within, which will have its turn to be heard, as indeed it ought to be heard always. They therefore are the happy persons, not that can spend the most hours in forgetfulness of themselves, in idle and unwise, and perhaps criminal gratifications, but who can delight to be their own companions ; can enjoy the calmer and stiller, but much more inward and real pleasure, of a serene and composed mind, of a worthy, and benevolent, and thankfully pious heart ; who are able to look back without shame, and forwards without fear. These are the satisfactions of a reasonable being ; which, as they who have once fully experienced them, have always declared to be the highest possible ; so they, who have not, should, in all fairness and common discretion, make due trial of them, before they reject them. And upon such trial they would find, that man is not a creature formed to dissipate himself in trifling levity, much less to wallow in debauchery and brutishness ; but hath the seeds of somewhat noble and divine planted in his breast ; which his great concern is to cultivate, improve and exert. They would learn a higher valuation of themselves, and feel how justly the son of *Sirach* hath directed : *Glorify thy soul in meekness, and give it honour according to the dignity thereof**.

As to the second inference, drawn by the ungodly, which patronises oppression and cruelty, there is something so hateful and shocking in these enormities ; so contrary to the tenderness, which is natural to our hearts, till we wickedly harden them ; so inconsistent with the welfare and very being of society, that no one guilty of such practices can at all expect either to be easy in himself, or safe from others. And therefore, though the interests of this life alone were to be considered, no argument could be rationally urged from the short-

ness of it, in favour of any thing so entirely opposite to the evident design of him who placed us here for our good, as both voluptuousness and injustice are.

But whatever conclusions men may think they can draw from this first and imperfect view, yet, when our life on earth is contemplated, in the second that was proposed, as a state of preparation for another and an endless one, then neither the wit, nor almost the folly of man, can make any other than virtuous inferences from the shortness of it. And to the want of looking upon it in this light, the book of Wisdom ascribes principally those profligate reasonings, which I have been confuting. *Such things did they imagine, and were deceived; for their own wickedness blinded them: as for the mysteries of God, they knew them not; neither hoped they for the wages of righteousness, nor discerned a reward for blameless souls* *. Without this knowledge, it was weak to argue as they did; but with this knowledge, it had been impossible; so important are the alterations which it makes in our case. Indeed it supplies us, in a very great measure, with three of the chief things which we want in our pilgrimage through the world. These are,

1. Conviction of the necessity of applying diligently to know and do our duty.
2. Encouragement to persist in it to the end against temptation.
3. Support under the afflictions to which we are exposed in the mean while.

Now, serious and frequent reflection, how soon the present state will terminate in one of infinitely more consequence, is adapted to be of the utmost service to us, in each of these respects, through that blessing, which God is ready to bestow on our sincere endeavours used, and prayers offered up, in the name of Christ; *for without him we can do nothing* †.

1. To keep alive in us a strong conviction of the necessity of applying diligently to know and do our duty.

Were this life the whole of our existence, there would be many thoughtless enough to imagine, that being so short, there could be no mighty difference in what manner it was spent,

* Wisd. ii. 21, 22.

† John xv. 5.

spent, right or wrong; for so small a journey, any way of undertaking it would serve, and fancy be guide sufficient; the advantages of choosing well could not be exceeding great; the inconveniences of choosing ill would soon be over, indeed whenever one pleased; and the end of all things would quickly come, when prudence and imprudence would be just upon a level. But plausible as this may look, when it gratifies the prevailing humour, surely whoever conceives the present state to be his whole portion, be it as short as it will, ought to think it deserves his whole attention; else he may not only miss all the happiness that he can promise himself, but find there is room enough for such a one as he is, to be more than a little miserable as long as he lives; notwithstanding which, he will probably wish to continue in being as long as he can.

Yet still, if the supposition, on which these men venture their all, were true, the harm which they would suffer by conducting themselves absurdly, would not be so extremely pitiable; and they might contrive to make it appear much less than it is. For affectation and obstinacy can support some, for a time at least, in bearing a great deal, and calling it a trifle: but whatever trifles the pleasures and the pains of this life may be, the felicity reserved for good persons in another, and the punishment to be inflicted (and which our consciences tell us will be justly inflicted), on such as have perverted and abused their own natures, injured their fellow-creatures, disobeyed the commands, and defeated the purposes of their Creator; these things must be of moment unspeakable; and which of them shall be our lot, absolutely depends on the use we make of the space allowed us here. How greatly doth it concern us then, carefully and frequently to examine what share we have *wrought of the works of him that sent us*; and to recollect, how soon *the night* may and must come, in which no man can work*.

To know the former, we must search, through the wide extent of the divine law, into our performances and our deficiencies; whether we have uniformly expressed towards our Maker, our Redeemer, our Sanctifier, that reverence and love, that resignation and thankfulness, that hatred of sin,
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* John ix. 4.

and universality of obedience, which their authority over us, and goodness to us, so strongly require ; whether, on all occasions in common life, we have been so just and upright, so mild and forgiving, so charitable and bountiful, so friendly and compassionate, so faithful and attentive to the various duties of our several stations and relations, as we know we ought ; whether, lastly, in the government of ourselves we have been so observant of purity and decency, so temperate and abstinent, so indifferent about things below compared with those above, as becomes beings designed to sustain the character of rational, moral, religious, Christian. If we have not, and most certainly we have not, can we truly say, that we have repented and thrown ourselves on God's mercy in Jesus Christ, and are still in a penitent and believing state ? Unless this be so, the one thing needful is hitherto undone ; and even if it be done, yet how much employment is there still upon our hands, to perfect our humiliation for what is past, and undo, as far as we can, all the evil that we have ever done, and perhaps have been doing for a long time, against our fellow-creatures, as well as in the sight of God ! Not only our external behaviour, but the inward principles of it, must be continually reformed : all our bad inclinations first be detected, which is no easy task, then gradually subdued, which is a very hard one ; especially when we have suffered them by indulgence to strengthen their original hold on our hearts. They cannot be extirpated in this life ; they will frequently rebel, and yet must be always overcome. But this is not the whole. Further still, every Christian virtue, every qualification prescribed in the word of God, must be planted in our souls, tenderly cherished, and incessantly carried on towards maturity. For it is only *if these things be in us and abound*, that *an entrance shall be ministered unto us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour* *. How little we have of some of them, how much too little of all, we cannot be totally ignorant. But we shall never know, as we ought, and yet less be able to supply our defects, unless we are both enlightened and strengthened by the grace of God. Have we then prayed and laboured for this ;

* 2 Pet. i. 8, 11.

this ; and have we obtained it ; and are we making a proper use of it ? Without it our hope of amendment is vain ; and even with it, so much is wanting to be done, that we have by no means any time to throw away.

For, alas, what is the time of man upon earth ? The whole of it short ; a great part of it necessarily filled up with things not related, or very remotely, to our main business ; perhaps, if not certainly, much the greatest part already past, and irrecoverably gone ; so past, it may be, as to encrease both our work, and the difficulties of it, in the remainder. That remainder also will fly as speedily ; and, unless we take care, as unprofitably too, as what preceded. And how small a remnant it may prove to those, who have seemingly the best reasons for making themselves large promises, we can never know, amidst the perpetual accidents that cut off such great numbers in the prime of their days ; and are many of them too sudden to leave room, even for that miserable comfort, a death-bed repentance.

It appears very harsh, and is extremely painful, to give people, in a dangerous sickness, the slightest intimation how little this remedy is likely to avail them ; and therefore they ought to be the more frequently and strongly reminded of it, whilst they may hear it with less terror, and greater benefit. A presumptuous or thoughtless mortal, lives negligently and sinfully year after year, in hopes of repenting of his sins, when he comes to the end of his days ; that is, doth a multitude of ill actions, in hopes that hereafter he shall heartily wish he had never done them. Can this be ? Are such persons in earnest ? No : but they are trying, if possible, to cheat God and themselves at the same time ; to disobey his will so artfully, as to avoid punishment, and obtain reward. Now what imaginable prospect is there, that from a heart so deliberately false, any true repentance will ever come ? Besides, what certainty is there, that any one will have time allowed him, or that his understanding will not fail, or that he will not grow hardened instead of penitent ; or indeed, that he shall have spirits and attention sufficient, in the midst of pain, and sickness, and languor, to recollect his numerous transgressions, and to apply earnestly for pardon. If he hath, undoubtedly it is the best and only thing that he can do for himself ; and
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omitting it is making a very bad case greatly worse. But still, to be grieved for our sins only when we can live no longer in them, and are afraid of being immediately condemned for them, is a very suspicious kind of sorrow: and moreover, it is not to mere sorrow that God hath promised forgiveness, nor to mere faith; but to such only as will produce amendment, for which, in these circumstances, there is little or no room. Nor can either by-standers, or the dying man himself, know in the least, whether it would produce any, were a longer life to be granted; or whether he would not relapse, as thousands of others, notwithstanding the most promising appearances, have done, into his former wickedness. And therefore no one can, on sure grounds, either administer comfort to others, or take it to himself, in such a case, how dreadful soever it will be to have none in that hour, when we shall want it most.

Since therefore our preparation must be made before our end comes, which will come soon, and may come when we think of it least, how vigilant should we be not to spend any of our time in sin, and how unwilling to spend more than is necessary in trifles; how studious to make our common employments in life consistent with, and subservient to, our *heavenly calling**; how careful to be always in readiness, to have *our loins girded, and our lights burning, like men that wait for their Lord*†; lest, coming suddenly, he find us sleeping‡. How frequently should we imagine ourselves in the condition in which we must be shortly; when the pleasures, the profits, the pre-eminences, that we have pursued so eagerly, will vanish into nothing; when the duties that we have slighted so boldly, will appear the most important of all things; and the only firm support will be, *that in simplicity and godly sincerity, by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world*§. Why should we not think now, as we certainly shall then? Why should we not act now, as we shall wish from the bottom of our hearts we had done; and wish in vain hereafter for what at present is undoubtedly feasible, and but moderately difficult?

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* Heb. iii. 1. † Luke xii. 35, 36. ‡ Mark xiii. 36. § 2 Cor. i. 12.

Such reflections as these may be disagreeable to us, but they will become very supportable. God, in great mercy, hath framed us so, that the consideration of mortality, however awful, is not too strong for us. We can look upon it without overpowering our faculties, and turn our thoughts from it with ease to the daily business, and even amusements of life. But it would be a most unworthy and pernicious return, because he doth not force it upon our minds constantly, which would unfit us for this world, therefore to lay it out of them entirely, or so near it as to neglect providing for the next. And the more averse any one is from meditating on these things, the more needful it is for him. Not thinking of death will ward it off never the longer, but only make it infinitely terrible when it comes; and thinking of it effectually will bring it never the sooner, but only dispose us to wait for it in peace, and receive it with calm resignation, if not with joy. *O that men were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end**.

2. The shortness of this life, when we view it as an introduction to another, besides proving, in the strongest manner, the necessity of diligence in our duty, gives also the greatest encouragement to persevere in it, against all difficulties and temptations.

Indeed the pains that we take to lay aside our faults, and cultivate our virtues, will seldom fail to reward themselves plentifully even here, by *the peaceable fruits of righteousness*†. But were it commonly otherwise; were the yoke of our Master heavy, and his burden grievous, it is not long that we have to bear it. The warfare against our spiritual enemies; the sorrow of being too often unsuccessful in it; the watchfulness over our bad inclinations; the painfulness of self-denial; the ridicule and censure of *a world that lieth in wickedness*‡; all this will soon be past, and we shall *receive the end of our faith* and obedience, *the salvation of our souls*§. If the other life were very distant, and *the crown of glory*|| not to be given us, till we had been some hundreds of years, like the ancient patriarchs, *fighting the good fight*¶, and *enduring*
 VOL. III. X *hardness,*

* Deut. xxxii. 29.

§ 1 Pet. i. 9.

† Heb. xii. 11.

|| 1 Pet. v. 4.

‡ 1 John v. 19.

¶ 2 Tim. iv. 7.

hardness, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ *, *it were less wonder, if any should grow weary, and faint in their minds* †: but since the days of our trial are thus few, and eternal felicity is annexed to so short a struggle, we may cheerfully *hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, and provoke one another to love and good works; and so much the more continually, as we see the day approaching* ‡. *Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and bath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts; for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh* §.

And as the nearness of another state lessens very considerably the difficulties of virtue, so doth it also the advantages of sin; which indeed are seldom real, even here, but much the contrary, were all duly considered, whatever bad men imagine, *whom their own wickedness blinds* ||, as they well deserve it should. But supposing them ever so often in the right, the utmost benefit they can receive is but for the present life, it may be, for a very small part of it: and all that we can possibly get or lose, enjoy or suffer in this world, bears no proportion to that which is to come. Indeed whatever must have an end, can bear no proportion to that which hath none. And consequently, were we to live ever so long, provided we were to die at all, there could be no reasonable comparison between our interest in the present life and the future: but when the present not only ought in reason to be looked on as nothing, but shews itself to our very senses to be as nothing; when we can so easily reckon up the few years it is composed of, *the bounds appointed, which it cannot pass* ¶; even then to let ourselves be cheated with it, and the poor false promises it makes us; and for these to quit the hopes of an immortality, just ready to be conferred on us, the blessedness of which exceeds our imagination, and will be continually increasing for ever; this is what nothing, but the melancholy experience of it, could make one believe was possible. But so the fact stands. Men give up eternity in exchange for a moment:
here

* 2 Tim. ii. 3.

† Heb. xii. 3.

‡ Heb. x. 23—25.

§ James v. 7, 8.

|| Wisd. xi. 21.

¶ Job xiv. 5.

here they will have their portion, whatsoever shall come after. And though they must know, would they think at all, that *the judgment of the wicked lingereth not, and their damnation doth not slumber* *; yet either they fly from the conviction, or they harden themselves against it; and desperately resolve, that nothing, but what is present, shall make any impression upon them; whereas, in just reckoning, every thing present should be regarded almost only as it promotes or obstructs our preparation for futurity. Faithfulness to our duty should be our whole concern; and what we may suffer here by doing it, or gain here by transgressing it, should be accounted very insignificant; as we certainly shall account it, if once we obtain from God the skill of *numbering our days* aright.

3. The last use which I shall mention, of considering how soon this life will terminate in another, is, that we should support ourselves with the prospect of being happy shortly, under all that may afflict us in the mean while.

Indeed, were there to be no future state, the misfortunes of the present would be much the more tolerable for ending so soon: but still, losing the comforts of it would then be losing our all; and going through it in misery, would embitter our whole existence. Now, were the space of it more or less, yet being the whole, we could have nothing to make us amends for our disappointments and sufferings, or to exalt us above them. Death indeed would free us, earlier or later, and so far be a remedy; but a very gloomy one, were all to end there; such a one as most people would think worse than the disease, and be, *through fear of it, all their lifetime subject to bondage* †. But now, as the interests of this world are only a small part of our concern, they deserve only a small part of our consideration; and as the conclusion of the present scene is immediately followed by a second, which shall never conclude, it furnishes out to us a triumph over its own terrors. *O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory* ‡?

Bad persons indeed can derive no comfort from hence; for the end of their worldly sorrows, is the beginning of infinitely more dreadful ones. But if we are sincerely pious and

X 2

virtuous,

* 2 Pet. ii. 3.

† Heb. ii. 15.

‡ 1 Cor. xv. 55.

virtuous, the crosses and troubles, under which we may labour here, the parting with our friends, the provocations of our enemies, poverty and contempt, sickness and pain, the wearisomeness of old age, the feebleness of decaying nature, whatever can be grievous to us, will not only soon be succeeded by happiness, but will increase that happiness unspeakably, provided we only bear it with a dutiful patience for this little interval. *Now therefore, why disquietest thou thyself, seeing thou art but a corruptible man? and why art thou moved, whereas thou art but mortal? and why hast thou not considered the thing that is to come, rather than that which is present*?*

We cannot indeed, through the original weakness of our depraved faculties, be so much cheered by these considerations as we have cause; and we should not despair upon it; but we may be cheered by them much more than we are; and we should endeavour it to the utmost; assuring ourselves, that in our future state, we shall smile at recollecting the heaviest calamities of this, with much more contempt than we always do, in our maturer years, at remembering the petty afflictions of our childhood.

Let us resolve then, that we will try to *take, even joyfully*, not only the losses of this world, *knowing that we have in heaven a better, and an enduring substance†*; but also the *dissolution of this tabernacle*, since *when we are unclothed, we shall be clothed upon with an house eternal, and mortality be swallowed up of life‡*. Let us, under all pressures, of whatever kind, *look up, and lift up our heads, for our redemption draweth nigh§*; and contentedly wait *all the days of our appointed time, till our change come||*; never casting away that confidence *which hath great recompence of reward; for yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry¶*. These reflections let us familiarize to ourselves; and learn from them to fix our hearts, not on such unworthy objects as we are subject to be disappointed about every moment, whilst we have them, and must at farthest, in a few years, undergo the final disappointment of parting with them for ever; but extend

* 2 Esdr. vii. 15, 16.

§ Luke xxi. 28.

† Heb. x. 34.

|| Job xiv. 14.

‡ 2 Cor. v. 1—4.

¶ Heb. x. 35, 37.

tend our ambition to nobler views; and since we are made for eternity, become superior both to the pleasures and the griefs of time; that being neither seduced by the one, nor dejected by the other, we may go on with a steady and cheerful attention to our present duty, and our approaching bliss; till the *few and evil days of our pilgrimage* * being ended, we may have our consummation in peace; and be admitted everlasting inhabitants of that *city, which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God* †.

* Gen. xlvii. 9.

† Heb. xi. 10.

S E R M O N C V I I I .

THE CERTAINTY OF THE COMMUNICATION OF DIVINE (THOUGH
INVISIBLE) INFLUENCES TO GOOD MEN.

JOHN XV. 26.

*But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you
from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth
from the Father, he shall testify of me.*

THE blessings which we have received from the Sovereign Lord of all, are either the original ones of creation and providence, or the superadded one of redemption from sin and misery. The former sort are in some measure discoverable by reason, but much more fully made known by revelation; of the latter our whole knowledge is from revelation alone. But being, through its means, once acquainted with those new relations, in which God's mercy to fallen man hath placed us, and with the new obligations to which they subject us, it is no less criminal to disregard this part of religion than the other, since not only the foundation of it, in the truth of things, is equally real, but its importance to our happiness, if possible, greater. And the several persons of the Sacred Trinity having manifested their love to us, by concurring in our recovery, and conducting and executing, according to the disposition of infinite wisdom, their several shares of that gracious work; we are consequently bound to distinct acts of faith and duty towards each; the performance of which, agreeably to the direction of God's word, constitutes the peculiar duty of a Christian. Amongst these, the present season leads us to consider, what offices the Holy Ghost hath condescended to execute for our salvation. And as they consist partly in testifying to us outwardly the certainty of our religion,

religion, partly in moving us inwardly to be affected by it as we ought, I shall discourse now on the former of these points, by laying before you,

I. More generally, the testimony given by the blessed Spirit, in successive ages, to divine truths; above all to the grant of a Saviour to mankind.

II. In a more particular manner, that ever memorable confirmation, vouchsafed, as on this day, to the doctrine of the gospel, by his descending on the apostles, and enduing them with miraculous gifts; of which I shall prove the reality, and draw from it proper inferences. For it will be useful to put you in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth*.

I. First then, I shall lay before you, more generally and briefly, the testimony given by the Spirit, in successive ages, to divine truths.

Prophecy, as St. Peter observes, came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake, as they were moved, by the Holy Ghost†. Accordingly we find in multitudes of places, from the earliest book of scripture to the latest, supernatural impulses and illuminations ascribed to the Spirit of God‡: nor can we doubt therefore, but they proceeded from him always, though sometimes it is not expressly affirmed. So that we are to honour the third person as the immediate inward instructor of men from the foundation of the world; as him who hath admonished, reproved, and striven with the wicked; who hath warmed and cheered the hearts of the pious in all times, with manifestations of God's will, with declarations of his favour, with precautions against unseen dangers, with promises of deliverance from the heaviest afflictions, with his presence and guidance in the most intricate difficulties. But as the principal demonstration of the goodness of Heaven, was the purpose of sending our blessed Lord into the world, this most important dispensation it was the peculiar care of the Holy Spirit to notify; giving first such darker and less explicit intimations of it, as how-

ever

* 2 Pet. i. 12.

† 2 Pet. i. 21.

‡ Gen. vi. 3. xli. 38. Numb. xi. 25, 26. xxiv. 2. 1 Sam. x. 10. 2 Kings ii. 9, &c. 1 Chr. xii. 18. 2 Chr. xv. 1. Neh. ix. 30. Ezek. ii. 2. Zech. vii. 12. Rev. i. 10. ii. 7. iv. 2, &c.

ever sufficiently answered the necessities of mankind ; then gradually unfolding and opening the several particulars of the scheme, so as that every generation might be blessed with some new accession of light and comfort beyond the former ; and that, by duly proportioned intervals, *the day might dawn, the day-star arise* *, then at length *the Sun of Righteousness* † shine forth ; at which time all the variety of types and prophecies, and all the intricate steps of Providence through all ages, should plainly appear to point out and centre in this one great event, and undeniably shew, that *known unto the Lord are all his works from the beginning* ‡.

Now therefore *the fulness of time being come* §, and the circumstances of things fitly disposed, the next operation of the Spirit of God, for our redemption, was the supernatural conception of the promised Saviour || ; on whom he afterwards descended like a dove at his baptism ¶ ; led him into the wilderness to triumph over the tempter ** ; and so conducted the man *Jesus* through his whole state of humiliation, that all he said and did is represented in scripture as proceeding from this influence ; and those mighty works of his, which bore witness of him, are to be considered as repeated testimonies of the Spirit on his behalf. Thus he himself hath taught us, laying claim to the words of *Isaiab* : *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me : for he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor ; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind* ††. And again, *If I by the Spirit of God do cast out devils, then is the kingdom of God come unto you* ‡‡. And in like manner *St. Peter* : *That word, which was published through all Judea, ye know ; how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power ; who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil ; for God was with him* §§. But besides the miracles which he performed before his death, the New Testament, according to the common, and I think true interpretation, ascribes also to the same divine agent that great miracle and foundation of our faith, his rising again ;

* 2 Pet. i. 19. † Mal. iv. 2. ‡ Acts xv. 18. § Gal. iv. 4.

|| Matth. i. 18. ¶ Matth. iii. 16, ** Matth. iv. 1.

†† Is. lxi. 1. Luke iv. 18. ‡‡ Matt. xii. 28. §§ Acts x. 37, 38.

again ; where he is said by St. *Paul* to have been *declared the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of Holiness, by the resurrection from the dead* * ; and by St. *Peter* to have been *put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit* †.

Thus then it appears in general, that from the earliest times *the Spirit of prophecy was the testimony of Jesus* ‡ ; and bore witness to his gospel by continual signs and wonders, during his abode on earth. I now proceed,

II. To that particular confirmation of it, by the descent of the Holy Ghost on his apostles, which he foretells, in the text and elsewhere, should follow his leaving the world ; and which produced effects so greatly superior to all preceding attestations, that the Holy Ghost is said in scripture not to have been given, or as other copies read it, not to have been before § ; meaning comparatively ; and in respect, not of his existence, but his operations on believers.

Now these were reserved, for several good reasons, till after our Saviour's ascension. It was prophesied of him, that *when he ascended up on high, he should lead captivity captive ; subject to himself multitudes who had been slaves to the wicked one ; and, as the means of doing this, should receive gifts for, and give them unto men* || : which prediction St. *Paul* expressly quotes ¶, and St. *Peter* surely alludes to it, when he saith, *Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear* **. It was a proper beginning of the exercise of that authority, with which he had been so lately invested ; and a new and most seasonable proof of it, especially to his poor disciples, who must extremely have wanted comfort under the loss of his personal presence. Now no comfort could be so reviving, as to find the tokens of his power even increased by his absence, and themselves enlightened with greater knowledge of truth, and strengthened with more ability of performing mighty deeds, than when *he went in and out amongst them* ††. Besides, now they were to go immediately on their unparalleled

VOL. III. Y enterprize,

* Rom. i. 4.

† 1 Pet. iii. 18.

‡ Rev. xix. 10.

§ John vii. 39.

Comp. Acts xix. 2.

|| Pl. lxviii. 11.

¶ Eph. iv. 8.

** Acts ii. 33.

†† Acts i. 21.

enterprise, the conversion of mankind; and therefore now, and not before, it was time they should be furnished with the miraculous qualifications requisite for that purpose.

Accordingly, *when the day of Pentecost*, the tenth after the ascension, *was fully come*, a festival, at which the Jews and proselytes of all countries and languages resorted to Jerusalem, besides that large numbers of them usually dwelt there, the apostles *were all with one accord in one place*. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing wind; and it filled the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them *cloven tongues, like as of fire*, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance *. There were, it seems, a few inconsiderate creatures, as the sort is too common, who found matter of ridicule in this, and *mocking, said, These men are full of new wine* †. But the very imagination, that twelve serious men should, every one of them, be so unaccountably overtaken, at so unlikely an hour too as nine in the morning, was incredible and absurd, as St. Peter well observed ‡, whose speech, made instantly on the occasion, in the words of truth and soberness §, if ever any was, would alone abundantly have confuted the charge, even though he had not named it. And yet a farther confutation was (and there could not be a stronger), that the foreigners present must know, whether the languages they heard were real ones; and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judea must some of them know, whether they, who spoke them, had ever learnt them; and the result was, not that they were detected, but that *three thousand souls were added to them the same day* ||; and the numbers increased continually ¶.

In this chapter of the Acts indeed there is mention only of the single gift of tongues, as being the most remarkable in itself, and most immediately exercised. But from the whole of their history it appears, that the apostles were entrusted, and doubtless at the same time, with various other supernatural endowments; as their Lord had promised them, that they should do the same, and even greater works than he, *because*

* Acts ii. 1—4.

§ Acts xxvi. 25.

† Ver. 13.

|| Acts ii. 41.

‡ Ver. 15.

¶ Ver. 43.

he went unto his Father *. And besides the powers, of which many inferior disciples partook with them, there was one peculiar to them; that, by prayer and imposition of hands, they were able to communicate the gifts of speaking with tongues, and performing miracles, to whom they thought proper. Once indeed, in the extraordinary and new case of *Cornelius, the Holy Ghost fell*, without human interposition, *on all which heard the word preached* †, as he had done at first on the apostles; that the whole world might be fully convinced of what the Jews were very backward to believe, that *to the Gentiles also God had granted repentance unto life* ‡, since he had given *his Spirit to them, even as he did unto others, putting no difference between them* §. And thus did the Comforter testify, not only the truth of Christianity in general, but our title, who are descended from Heathens, to a share in the blessings of it; without which testimony perhaps we had *sat to this day in darkness, and the shadow of death* ||. But still, ordinarily speaking, that the superior dignity of the apostles might be preserved, and by its means the unity of the church, and the purity of the faith, these miraculous gifts were conveyed only through their hands, to such persons, as by illumination from above, they saw to be qualified for them.

Thus then, to speak in the terms of *St. Paul*, *to one man was given by the Spirit the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge, to another faith, to another the gifts of healing, to another the working of other miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another divers kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues; but all these wrought that one and the self same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he willed* ¶. And now, imagine a church of Christians, under the conduct of some of our Lord's immediate disciples, and exhibiting to the world around them such gifts as these. Represent to yourselves, first, a number of plain unlearned men delivering a doctrine, perfectly worthy of God, and suited to the nature and condition of mankind; evidently and vastly more so, than all the discoveries of unassisted reason, in all ages, put together, had been able to furnish; professing

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themselves

* John xiv. 12.

† Acts x. 44.

‡ Acts xi. 18.

§ Acts xv. 8, 9.

|| Luke i. 79.

¶ I Cor. xii. 8—11.

themselves to have received, and been charged to spread it through the earth, by a person of a character absolutely faultless ; whose birth and actions, and every thing material that befell him, had been gradually foretelling ever since the creation, and all came to pass accordingly ; whom, in farther confirmation of his authority, they had seen, for years, performing daily miracles of the highest power, and the tenderest goodness ; whom they had seen supporting the reality of his mission, by calmly delivering himself up, and suffering death on the cross ; whom yet afterwards they frequently beheld alive, and conversed with, till at length, while they stood by him, a cloud received him into heaven : Supposing them all to persist unanimously in this account, without any possible interest to serve by it, and with the hourly danger of being detected, if what they said was false ; to have continually before their eyes, and one after another to undergo, at considerable distances of time, with the utmost cheerfulness, every thing that can be dreadful to human creatures, merely for asserting these facts, and behaving suitably to them : such a testimony to such a religion, must surely, without any additional proof, appear thoroughly convincing to every honest and reasonable mind. But lest, after all, it should be thought possible, that these witnesses might either, by some strange means, be all deceived in every one of the above-mentioned evidences, or all agree (though one sees not why they should, or how with any success they could), to deceive others in them, let it be farther supposed, that from being ignorant and slow of understanding, as they notoriously were, they now of a sudden *speak with a wisdom and a spirit*, which their adversaries *are not able to resist* * ; that from being exceedingly timorous mortals, they are likewise of a sudden, when there is more ground for fear than ever, become totally void of fear, and rejoice to suffer in defence of their cause : that being well known neither to have enjoyed opportunities of learning in their own country, nor yet to have travelled out of it ; well known to have had, a few weeks before, no other dialect than their native rustic idiom of Galilee (which they had not skill enough to disguise, when they would have wished

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* Acts vi. 10.

ed it most, but were betrayed by their speech, and found out for what they were); that these, quickly after, are qualified to discourse fluently and properly with men of all the different nations of the world, and that *each bears them speak, in their own tongues, the wonderful works of God**; that, farther still, they can foretell things future, discern the very secrets of mens hearts, heal diseases, raise the dead, inflict miraculous punishments on their opposers; in a word, can work all the wonders which they affirm their Master to have wrought; and, which is more, enable others, altogether strangers to them, immediately on their believing, to work the same: what can there be wanting to satisfy every examiner completely; and whence can these things proceed, but from the power of the Divine Spirit?

Now such were the proofs on which the first Christians assert they received their religion: and their very reception of it, notwithstanding such prejudices of education against it, and threatening discouragements from it, is the strongest presumption, that the arguments urged to them were convincing, and their belief undeniably true. It is an acknowledged fact, that Christianity spread, in a very few years, through every nation then known, and that multitudes of every rank embraced it. Now, by what possible means could a faith, so entirely opposite to the established superstitions of all countries, and the favourite vices of all the inhabitants of them, be thus propagated, in a knowing and inquisitive age, by a handful of men, without learning and without power, against all the learning and power of the world, vigorously and without delay applied to withstand it, but by such testimonies of the Divine Spirit in its favour, as the first Christians unanimously say attended its progress? These afford a clear explication of this wonderful change; and fair inquiry will shew that nothing else can. It is easy to pick out little cavils, nay indeed to raise very plausible objections here and there, against the evidence of any thing. It is easier still to get a few general phrases of enthusiasm, and bigotry, and imposture, and credulity, and throw them about at random. But let any unbeliever take only the undoubted facts, relating to Christianity

* Acts ii. 8, 11.

in its first rise, and try to solve them upon his principles, entering into particulars, and he will find it impracticable, not only to give any account attested by history, how they did happen (though that he ought to do), but even any guess or imaginary supposition how they could happen, if our religion be false, that will not be full of infinitely greater difficulties and incredibilities, than he can pretend to allege against the truth of it. And therefore either the gospel prevailed by these miracles, for which we contend, or its prevailing without them was the most amazing miracle of all.

But besides this way of reasoning, to prove that there must have been such gifts, we have direct historical evidence, that there actually were such.

Indeed what you have already heard concerning them, from the Acts of the Apostles, carries with it very sufficient authority. For that book was the work of an author who lived at the time, and had means of being well acquainted with what he relates, and could have no temptation to write falsehoods; and was allowed, by those who must know, to have written truth. But the argument from St. *Paul's* epistles appears to be somewhat stronger yet: And the strength of it lies in this narrow compass, that they were certainly written by him, and immediately received, and highly esteemed, by the several churches to whom they are directed; that in them he mentions frequently the supernatural gifts of the Spirit, as then subsisting in those churches; that he would not have dared to do this, had there been no such thing; or if he had, he and his letters could never have been respected, as they certainly were.

For the first point, that these epistles are really his, we have the strongest external evidence imaginable; the testimony of some of his contemporaries, of many who lived immediately after him, and the universal consent of mankind. But the internal marks and characters of their being genuine, are, if possible, yet more convincing to a judge of such matters. There is an evident air and look of truth and preciseness preserved throughout them. The numbers of persons, on various occasions, named in them; the minute directions and orders that are sent; the obscurity of several passages, occasioned by their referring to questions asked and accounts of things given

given by the churches ; and to their present situation, in one respect or another, are manifest tokens that they are what they profess to be. A writer of counterfeit pieces, would either be too artful to venture into such particulars, or must have failed in some of them. But then the reception of them by the congregations to which they are inscribed, completes the impossibility of a fraud. Suppose an impostor to draw up letters of a considerable length to such and such societies, churches for instance, relating to many of their members and acquaintance, and to many things, of many sorts, done, believed, or debated amongst them, and not to make in any one of these a single mistake, which is quite inconceivable ; yet, when these performances came into the hands of these persons, pretending in the title to have been sent to them or their fathers, not many years before, can it be imagined they will all agree to receive them as such, though till then they had neither original, nor copy, nor memory, nor tradition of them ? A false history may creep silently into the world, and obtain credit by degrees. A false collection of letters may impose on strangers, remote in place or time : But that the very men, or body of men, to whom they declare themselves to have been written a little while ago, and who absolutely know nothing of their ever being written to them at all, should believe in them, is utterly inconceivable ; and still more so, if these letters affirm such extraordinary things to be then doing amongst them, as could not have been forgotten, if they had been done, and yet are not remembered. Now it never was, or can be denied, that *St. Paul's* epistles were admitted as his, and honoured as sacred, were continually read and quoted, both in private and public, by those churches, of which they bear the names, not some ages after his death, for then there might have been colour for a charge of imposition, but from his own days downwards. Nay, if we allow the testimony of early and venerable writers, his originals themselves were preserved there (a thing by no means unlikely) to following generations.

Now in these epistles, thus proved authentic, the miraculous operations of the Holy Ghost appear to have been common amongst Christians. The workers of miracles, they who spoke with tongues, who prophesied, who had the gift of healing,

healing, are mentioned there as familiarly as the apostles, elders, and teachers. Nay farther, as the exercise of some of these powers in the church, it seems, was irregular sometimes, and made confusion, there are many directions laid down by the apostle for the regulation of it. And farther still, because the persons endued with them were too apt to value themselves, and be valued by others, immoderately on account of them, he insists very much, in the true spirit of Christianity, on the preferableness of *charity*, that is, of love to God and man, before *speaking with the tongues of men and angels*, before *prophecy*, before the *faith that could remove mountains* *. Is it possible now, that all this should be written to, and received and respected by persons who had no such gifts amongst them? Is it possible also, that St. Paul, when, as we find in these very letters, he had rivals and enemies in these churches, men of interest and influence, of art and subtlety, should, in the face of them all, appeal, as he doth, to miracles performed by himself and others, for a proof of his authority and doctrine, before their eyes, if in reality neither he, nor any one else, had ever performed any? Observe how he expostulates with the Galatians on the danger of their apostatizing from the gospel to the law. *O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that you should not obey the truth? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit, the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, by the works of the law, or by the bearing of faith? He that ministereth the Spirit to you, and worketh miracles among you, doth he it by the works of the law, or the bearing of faith* †? Again, he boldly pleads to the Judaizing Roman converts, those things which Christ had wrought by him to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed, through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God ‡. And when, amongst the Corinthians, his apostleship had been questioned by some, his answer is, *Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in wonders and mighty deeds* §. And from the consciousness which he had of the assistance of the Spirit, he threatens to come to them again shortly, and know, not the speech of them, which are puffed up, but the power.

For

* 1 Cor. xii. 1, 2. † Gal. iii. 1, 2, 5. ‡ Rom. xv. 18, 19. § 2 Cor. xii. 12.

For the kingdom of God, he adds, *is not in word, but in power**; agreeably to what he had told them in a preceding chapter, that *his own preaching had not been with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that their faith might stand, not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God†*. Now, as it must be not only imprudence, but madness in him, to speak of these things, if they were not true, so his speaking of them could not but have produced the entire rejection of his epistles and himself, if the several churches had not known them to be true. And therefore, since these churches did continue to reverence him and them as of more than human authority, it follows, that these operations and miracles were both real and frequent amongst all Christians in general. For even when he was congratulating the illustrious church of *Corinth* on her gifts, he doth not hint to her (many and great as we know they were) that she was before, but only *not behind others* in that respect‡.

And now what remains is, that being satisfied of the certainty of these things, we lay seriously to heart the proper inferences from them; which are indeed too many to be enlarged on at present, but happily too plain to need it. In general, it follows, that the religion which we profess, is no other than the truth of God: the doctrines of it, however mysterious, reasonable objects of firm belief; the precepts, however difficult, matter of indispensable duty; its glorious rewards secure to every good person; its dreadful punishments unavoidable by every bad one. More particularly, in regard to that Spirit, which testifies these things, it follows, that we should honour him, as possessed of those divine attributes which they imply, and which the scripture ascribes to him repeatedly; that we should make our thankful acknowledgments for these his outward manifestations, and pray for his inward and saving influences on our souls; that we should receive the gospel more submissively, and obey it more diligently, for his having ratified and confirmed it in so unparalleled a manner; often recollecting for this purpose that awful admonition: *If the word spoken by angels, the law of Mo-*

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fes,

* 2 Cor. iv. 19; 20.

† 1 Cor. ii. 4, 5.

‡ 1 Cor. i. 7.

ses, was stedfast, and every transgression received a just recompence of reward, how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost *. To whom, with the Father and the Son, &c.

* Heb. ii. 2, 3, 4.

S E R M O N C I X.

THE CERTAINTY OF DIVINE AID BEING IMPARTED TO ALL
MEN WHO FEAR GOD, AND ENDEAVOUR SERIOUSLY TO
OBSERVE HIS MORAL PRECEPTS.

JOHN xiv. 15, 16, 17.

If ye love me, keep my commandments.

*And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another
Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever.*

*Even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, be-
cause it seeth him not, neither knoweth him : but ye know
him ; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.*

OUR blessed Lord might very possibly design to compre-
hend, in this promise, all the benefits which the Holy
Ghost was to confer on his followers. But his expressions
plainly shew, that he had chiefly in view, not the miraculous
gifts of the Spirit, but the directing and comforting influences
of his grace. For these alone are given to all, who *love Christ,*
and keep his commandments : These alone were to *abide with*
Christians for ever : These alone *the world could not receive*,
because they would not suffer themselves to *see or know them* :
and though, in appearance, a less illustrious, they are, in rea-
lity, a more important gift than those of tongues and mira-
cles. For though the latter were powerful means of making
religion believed, the former only can bring it to be practi-
sed ; and therefore it is highly necessary to teach and incul-
cate the doctrine of inward grace ; that men may earnestly
pray for it, faithfully use it, and heartily rejoice in it. Some
indeed have abused the persuasion of *God's working in them*

to a neglect of *working out their own salvation* *. Some have mistaken the feelings of an enthusiastic warmth for testimonies of the Divine Spirit; some have done extravagant, and others wicked actions, under pretence of his direction. But as their ascribing too much, can never warrant our ascribing too little to his influence on our hearts; and error is best confuted, not by maintaining the opposite error, but by setting forth the truth, I shall therefore endeavour,

I. To shew the credibility of this influence from reason:

II. To give a more certain and full account of it from scripture:

III. To reconcile it with experience: And

IV. To make suitable inferences from the whole.

I. To shew its credibility from reason; which, however needless, if men regarded scripture as they ought, may be useful in disposing them to regard it more than they do.

A little inspection into ourselves, will convince us what imperfect creatures we are, and how poorly qualified for the practice of piety and virtue. We have indeed, by nature, a general knowledge of our duty, and very just motives to it, with some dispositions in its favour. But then, on the other hand, we have much inattention to religious truths, and great prejudices against them; we have many bad inclinations to mislead us; we have an indolence that lets them easily prevail over us; we are in a world full of ill examples and vicious maxims of life; of enticements to unlawful pleasures, provocations to immoderate resentment, temptations to ambition, envy, covetousness, every sin. And sometimes a number of these enemies are combined together so strongly, and attack us so unprepared, that a much greater force than the ordinary powers of the human mind, would be very unlikely to stand against them. And when once they overcome us, every fall makes way for another; the sensibility of conscience decays, good affections are stifled, wrong passions inflamed, wrong customs formed, and reason, habituated to be over-powered, yields at length without struggle. Now, what is there to be expected, for the future, from men unassisted in these circumstances? It does not follow, indeed, that they will

* Phil. ii. 12, 13.

will always go on uniformly to destruction, without some intervals of better purposes and endeavours. From time to time their eyes shall be opened, their fears alarmed, excellent resolutions made, and, for a while, persevered in most zealously. But too soon this fervour cools, our vigilance abates, a thousand things happen to put us off our guard; and one thing alone, trusting in our own seeming strength, is sufficient to lull us into a security that will prove fatal. Sinful inclinations and habits always retain a stronger party within us than appears; and, when we least think of it, snatch a favourable opportunity, and recover their empire, perhaps more absolutely than before. After some experience of this kind, men come indeed to have less confidence in themselves. But what is the usual consequence? Why, that not looking beyond themselves, at the very time of forming good purposes, they scarce hope to keep them; and so their efforts grow daily more heartless and faint, till at last they become quite weary of the fruitless trouble; and, it may be, instead of trying any longer to be good, labour to persuade themselves, that they neither need, nor can be so.

This is plainly (ask your hearts if it be not) the common course of things; the daily event of the combat between mere human virtue, and the trials which this world throws in its way. Yet all the while it is an evident truth, that the very end of our being is the practising of these duties, which we find so difficult, and the rooting out of these sins, to which we feel ourselves so prone. Now, what God hath made us for, he must some way have provided we should be able to do, in such measure as he will accept. He most clearly sees the dangers to which we are exposed, and the poor degree of strength and preparation with which we meet them. The never-ceasing influences of his providence preserve and actuate every part of the material world. And can we imagine, that he, who is always taking care of all his other works, down to the very meanest things on this earth, will disregard the most important thing in it, the eternal interests of the souls of men? It would be injuring his goodness, his holiness, to think so.

It is true, beings endued with free will and choice, as we are, must not be acted on so as to destroy it, but suitably to
their

their nature. And how many such methods may there be within the reach of infinite wisdom and power? He who hath given us all the inward principles we have, cannot he, at pleasure, repair their decays, restrain their vehemence, rectify their disorders? He who hath established the ways by which his creatures communicate their minds one to another, must not he be able to communicate himself to them, when he judges it proper; to represent the beauty of goodness, the deformity of sin; to suggest proper motives of duty and interest; to turn their attention from dangerous objects; to inspire them with religious and virtuous affections; to bring into their minds just and wise rules of conduct; and all this at such times as shall be most needful for our reformation, our safety, our improvement? These invisible operations of God in our minds, are plainly no more inconsistent with our liberty, than the secret or open persuasions of our fellow mortals are. And therefore it is perfectly credible, that as we, who have so little goodness, are prompted by it however to advise and assist each other, he, who is absolutely good, will not refuse his gracious help, in such cases as really want it; and especially to such persons as humbly desire it, and honestly make use of it; for careless and presumptuous sinners have by no means the same ground to hope for aid from a just and holy God. But to what degree he will either strengthen the former, or admonish the latter, is entirely beyond human knowledge: only this we know, that he may do what he will with his own; and will do always what he sees to be wisest and best.

Nor is the persuasion of God's enlightening and assisting men to perform their duty, a notion started in these later ages of the world; but, from early times, the best and most considerate, even of the Heathens, have held and taught this doctrine: and all men every where implicitly own it, by offering up prayers to Heaven for direction, how they should act for help and success in their attempts; of which prayers, the faith of a divine interposition is the only possible ground. These things, put together, must surely, at least, prepare us to receive more readily, and with more entire confidence in it, that fuller light, of which I now proceed

II. To give some account from scripture. There we are taught, that human nature is corrupt and degenerate, and no longer able to stand alone against the temptations which itself breeds; and yet less when they are strengthened by the suggestions of wicked men, and of *our adversary the devil, who as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour**. That therefore our Maker, who still requires obedience from his creatures, and yet doth not require impossibilities, hath from the beginning *striven with the bad†, and instructed‡ and established § the good, by his Spirit within them ||*; though it was more abundantly poured forth when the gospel was published: from which we learn, that *except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven ¶*: That by *the Spirit of adoption***, changing our nature and condition, we are entitled, *through faith in Christ*, to call God our Father: And that *if we, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto our children, much more shall our Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him ††*. Now, in this declaration, our blessed Redeemer evidently means, not giving his miraculous powers (which few in proportion ever had, and perhaps none ever presumed to request for themselves), but his saving graces; which, to use the preceding words, *every one that seeketh findeth*; and which answer, in the spiritual life, to bread in the natural. Accordingly St. Paul, in the conclusion of his second epistle to the Corinthians, prays, that *the fellowship or communion, the communication of the blessings of the Holy Ghost, may be with them all, as well as the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God*. Certainly this means, not a benefit peculiar to a few in the primitive days, but an influence from the blessed Spirit on the soul, of which every true believer in every age might partake.

Thus then the Holy Ghost is given to all Christians. And, as we are taught in the same scriptures more particularly, he *opens our understandings †† and hearts §§*, that we may discern our lost condition, by sin original and actual; may attend

* 1 Pet. v. 2.

† Gen. vi. 3.

‡ Neh. ix. 20.

§ Ps. li. 12.

|| Gen. xli. 38.

¶ John iii. 5.

** Rom. viii. 15.

†† Luke xi. 13.

‡‡ Luke xiv. 45.

§§ Acts xvi. 14.

tend to the offers of the gospel, and *know the things that are freely given us of God* *. He also inclines our souls, not only to embrace, but *obey the truth* †. Such as comply with his motions, he *leads* ‡ uniformly on to their maturity in goodness, to *the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ* §. Those who deviate from the right way, he brings back ||; by representing partly the terrors of religion, partly the mercies; *renews them in the spirit of their minds* ¶, and forms them again to the image of God. In this manner he conducts the whole flock of Christ; *helps their infirmities* in their devotions, *making intercession within them* **; enables them to profit by the ordinances appointed for them ††; *teaches them all things* which they need to know ‡‡; in every affliction and temptation makes *his grace sufficient for them* §§. Proportionably as they use these advantages well, he *fills them with the fruits of his Spirit*, which are in *all goodness, and righteousness, and truth* ||||; and thus is present with them, and dwells in them continually more and more, so that they grow up, to use the apostle's expressions, *into temples of the Holy Ghost, Habitations of God through the Spirit* ¶¶.

Not that all good Christians have an equal sense or equal share of this happiness. For though they must feel, with some degree of comfort, the good dispositions which the Holy Ghost hath wrought in them, yet fears and doubts concerning their spiritual state may, at times especially, prevail: and the best persons, through mistaken opinion, or constitutional lowness of spirits, think too ill of themselves, as the worst people often think too well, and have lively perceptions of groundless confidence. It is not therefore by our inward enjoyments, but our obedience, that we are to judge of our condition. However, generally speaking, in those of confirmed goodness, the *Spirit bears witness* powerfully with their *spirit*; makes the testimony of their conscience clear and strong, *that they are the children of God* ***. And hence arises that joy in the Holy Ghost ††† the Comforter, which is a foretaste of heavenly

* 1 Cor. ii. 12. † 1 Pet. i. 2, 22. ‡ Rom. viii. 14. Gal. v. 18.

§ Eph. iv. 13. || Ps. cxix. 176. ¶ Eph. iv. 23. ** Rom. viii. 26

†† 1 Cor. xii. 7. ‡‡ 1 John ii. 20, 27. §§ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

|||| Eph. v. 9. Phil. i. 11. ¶¶ 1 Cor. vi. 19. Eph. ii. 21, 22.

*** Rom. viii. 16. ††† Rom. xiv. 17.

venly happiness; that assurance of God's favour, which is called in scripture, being *sealed with the Spirit of promise, the earnest of our inheritance* *.

And now, having seen what reason and scripture teach in this matter, it will be time to inquire,

III. Whether sad experience doth not contradict both. For it will be said, Who is there that feels any other principle moving within him, than the natural workings of his own mind? And it must be owned, that the generality of men, at least, have no such perception of any secret impulses upon them, as can make it certain, that the Spirit of God is the author of them, any otherwise than as we know, that *every good gift is from above* †. Yet sometimes a religious or virtuous thought shall present itself to us, so very suddenly and seasonably, that we cannot but have a more particular persuasion, if we reflect at all, of its proceeding immediately from a gracious invisible power. But were this otherwise, we every day see persons influenced by their fellow-creatures, and strongly too, without perceiving it in the least. And is not our Creator infinitely abler to do the same thing? Our Saviour argues very justly: *The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit* ‡. The very motion of the air is much too subtle to have its course and the manner of its operations minutely traced, yet its effects are very manifest, and very great. Thus likewise the Spirit of God, though it be invisible, is yet powerful in its movements, producing such changes in the heart as nothing else can.

But it may be urged, that even of these effects, there is by no means the evidence which might be expected. Many persons are as bad as they well can be; and few, if any, so good as they easily might be; where then is the proof of those heavenly influences, which are to reform the one sort, and perfect the other? Now we should remember, that throughout the dispensations of God towards rational creatures, he in no case doth so much as he can; for doing less is more properly suited to their make. As we have not by nature a sufficient

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power,

* Eph. i. 13, 14.

† James i. 17.

‡ John iii. 2.

power, he is ready to add to it. But as we have by nature some power of taking preliminary, though of themselves ineffectual steps towards amendment, he requires we should first exert that; and ordinarily will make our behaviour the measure of his own; though sometimes, *that he may shew the exceeding riches of his grace* *, he extends uncommon degrees of it to very great sinners. Our Saviour therefore, when in the text he promises the Holy Spirit to his disciples, doth it only on the condition, that, with the strength which they already had, they *kept his commandments*: and tells them, that the rest of *the world cannot receive this Comforter, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him*: they turn their eyes from the light, and harden themselves against feeling conviction. Yet even such he treats, by his Spirit, for some time, in the manner which himself describes: *Behold, I stand at the door, and knock. If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him* †. But if men *resist the Holy Ghost* ‡, grieve him §, and *do despite to him* ||, no wonder if at last he depart, and leave them to the sin and misery which they have chosen. *For into a malicious soul wisdom shall not enter, nor dwell in the body that is subject unto sin. The Holy Spirit of discipline will flee deceit, and remove from thoughts that are without understanding, and will not abide when unrighteousness cometh in* ¶.

They then, who are resolute in wickedness, can hope for no experience of our Saviour's promise; and, for the same reason, such as are irresolute in goodness, can expect but little. For the rule, so often repeated in the gospel, is, notwithstanding its first appearance, very reasonable: *Unto him that hath shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, even that he hath shall be taken from him* **: to all, who receive and use the grace of God, it shall be continually increased; and from all who repel and reject it, gradually withdrawn. If therefore persons, in some measure wellmeaning, too often feel, and consequently believe, scarce any thing of the good fruits of the Spirit, the reason is plain; either they neglect themselves in one part or another

of

* Eph. ii. 7.

† Rev. iii. 20.

‡ Acts vii. 51.

§ Eph. iv. 30.

|| Heb. x. 29.

¶ Wisd. i. 4, 5.

** Matth. xiii. 12. xxv. 29. Mark iv. 25. Luke viii. 18. xix. 26.

of their conduct, or they trust to themselves, and neglect God; of both which errors he will convince them. But if, by joining earnest prayer with diligent watchfulness, *we draw nigh unto him, he will soon draw nigh unto us* *, and *pour out his Spirit upon us* †. Indeed the very different effects that we shall find, both in ourselves and others, from acting in confidence of mere human strength, and relying on the power of the Divine grace, is proof sufficient from experience, that the cause which produces that difference, is a most real and most efficacious one. Let us therefore now proceed,

IV. To the inferences from, and uses of this doctrine; which are, that we be thankful for so great a blessing, and careful to improve by it.

I. That we be thankful. Indeed the natural powers which we have, are all of them the gracious gifts of a good God. But when these were so weakened and perverted, as they are by the fall of *Adam* and our own transgressions, then to provide for supplying their defects and rectifying their disorders, by daily offers of such light and strength as we daily want, instead of leaving us to ourselves, as we deserved, this is more abundant grace; and makes our situation, in some respects, better than that from whence our first parents fell. Consciousness of great strength is very apt to lead all persons, as probably it led them, into unforeseen dangers; which the more we despise, the more easily they overcome us. At least, it seldom fails to give us an esteem of, and confidence in ourselves, very unsuitable to the condition of a creature. Even in our present state, we are strangely inclined to think too highly of our good qualities; and to forget, that *whatever we have, we have received* ‡. How much more then should we do it, if our native poverty were not so evident in itself, and so clearly taught in God's word?

But further: the doctrine of grace is as powerful a guard against despair as against pride. Had our natural abilities been much greater than they are, and fully sufficient to resist every ordinary temptation, yet, had these been our whole ground of hope, when any trial of uncommon difficulty befall us, they could not have increased in proportion to it, but

A a 2

must

* James iv. 8.

† Prov. i. 23.

‡ 1 Cor. iv. 7

must have sunk under it. Whereas now we are sure, that as our danger is, so shall our strength be: that *God is faithful, who will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able; but will, with the temptation, make a way to escape**. Most gladly therefore, with *St. Paul*, may we glory in our infirmities, since *his grace is sufficient for us*, and *his strength is made perfect in our weakness†*: and most cheerfully may we set ourselves to *work out our own salvation, since it is he that works in us, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure‡*. Let us often consider then, what thankfulness it deserves, that God's Holy Spirit is thus active for our benefit; and at the same time let us always remember by whom this blessing is procured for us: *I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter*. The intercession of our blessed Lord, founded on his sacrifice of himself to divine justice in our stead, this is the channel through which grace is derived from the Fountain of all Good; and a lively faith in him is the only way of opening our hearts to receive the salutary streams of it. But then, as *faith without works is dead§*, we must be sure carefully to improve this invaluable gift. It was an ancient and useful precept of philosophy, that men should learn to reverence themselves and their own consciences. If this were not sufficient to keep wrong inclinations in awe, it was further directed, that they should imagine they were acting in the presence of some venerable person, whom they would be ashamed to have see their wickedness and their folly. Such as had perfecter notions of things, went yet further; and taught men, that in all which they thought and did, they were under the eye of an infinitely just and holy Being, the Maker, Lord, and Judge of all. It may seem that this consideration is the very weightiest that possibly can be: and yet it will strike us with an additional awe, if we reflect moreover, that in committing sin, we act not only against his known will, before his face, but against his counsel and command at that very time given us: that he is not only a witness of the good thoughts and suggestions that we reject, but himself the author of them: that when our hearts tell us we are doing ill, it is not their voice merely,
but

* 1 Cor. x. 13. † 2 Cor. xii. 9. ‡ Phil. ii. 12, 13. § James ii. 20.

but that of the Almighty speaking to us inwardly, that we disregard. Seldom do we fail in any great instance of our duty, but something within at the instant reproaches us with doing wrong. Were this nothing but our own judgment, we should be highly blameable for contradicting it. But what conviction must we feel, when we know it is indeed the Spirit of God; and reflect how often, how wilfully, how contemptuously, we have disobeyed such a monitor! The epistle to the Hebrews exhorts them: *Be not forgetful to entertain strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares**. Much stronger is the argument, why we should admit and embrace every pious and virtuous impulse and suggestion; for this is receiving into our souls a greater than angels, the Holy Ghost himself. Let us therefore humbly invite this divine guest to dwell with us, and ever open our hearts to his heavenly inspirations; which, as they will never prompt us to any thing but what reason or scripture plainly dictates, and, by that one mark, are easily distinguished from every false pretence to the Spirit; so they will effectually enable us, and they alone can, to persevere in our duty against all temptations; they will fill us with comfort under all afflictions; daily improve us in *all virtue and godliness of living*; and make us at length completely meet for the blessed inheritance of the saints in light†.

* Heb. xiii. 2.

† Col. i. 12.

S E R M O N CX.

THE ONLY SATISFYING EVIDENCE THAT A PORTION OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD IS IMPARTED TO MEN, IS THE UNIFORM DISPLAY OF PRACTICAL PIETY AND VIRTUE.

GAL. V. 22, 23.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

THESE words, even at the first reading of them, present to us a very engaging description of the good effects of the Spirit of God on the hearts of Christians; and consequently set before us a subject extremely proper for our attention at this time, when we celebrate the effusion, not only of his miraculous gifts, but of his saving graces: the former of which were no more than the means of spreading the gospel, the latter one of the great ends attained by it: the one temporary, the other perpetual.

But to apprehend the design of St. Paul in this passage more completely, it will be requisite to bear in our minds his principal intention throughout the epistle; which was to prove, that believers in Christ were not bound to observe the law of *Moses*; nor allowed, if they did observe it, to consider that as the ground of their acceptance with God. These indeed are points, concerning which we at present are fully satisfied; and therefore may possibly wonder at his taking so much pains to clear them up. But men were then very generally, and somewhat naturally, inclined to the contrary doctrine: that law being confessedly of divine institution; and our Saviour and his apostles, and all the first converts to Christianity, having kept it with great regard. Consider

sider also, that on the question, whether it was to be kept still, the practice, not only of that, but of every succeeding age, greatly depended. For even we of this must have borne the yoke of all the Jewish ceremonies, and retained all the statutes of the Jewish commonwealth, had it been at first decided that they continued obligatory. Nay, in a yet more important respect must the temper, and spirit of our religion, have been different from what it is, had we either expected to be justified by the works of our own righteousness in fulfilling God's law, as most of the Jews did; which must have nourished within us a Pharisaical pride, instead of Christian humility; or had we been convinced, as we easily might, that *our best works cannot endure the severity of God's judgment* *; and yet had been left to look for eternal life from precepts, which we obeyed so imperfectly, that they could only condemn us, instead of resting our hopes on him alone who came to save us. You will easily infer, that our mistake would be equally fatal, were we now to trust solely to our Christian good deeds, as if we had trusted in the Jewish. It was therefore with great reason, and great benefit to the faithful of all times, that St. *Paul* dwelt so much on these points, in so many of his epistles, as he did. For in most he hath inculcated them more or less, though in none so earnestly throughout as in that before us.

But then, as the law of *Moses* consisted not only of religious ceremonies, and rules of civil government, but moral duties likewise; and all these had been observed together on the same footing; to convince men, that the two former were designed to subsist no longer, and yet preserve a due regard to the last, was an affair of the utmost difficulty, but notwithstanding of absolute necessity. And therefore, as soon as ever he had asserted to the Galatians *the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free*, and exhorted them, in the beginning of this chapter, to *stand fast in it*, he quickly proceeds to confine it, ver. 13. within its proper bounds, by subjoining, *Only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh*; that is, to any wicked purpose. For our propensities to sin are frequently expressed in scripture by the word *flesh*, because they arise from

our present fallen state in this mortal body ; as, on the contrary, our dispositions to good are distinguished by the name *Spirit*, because they proceed from the Spirit of God ; and perhaps in part also, because they are approved by the spirit or reason of our own minds. Thus he opposes them in two verses after : *Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.*

But such general terms, though very useful on account of their comprehensiveness, are liable to be misapplied, or passed over with too little attention. And therefore, that no one might be ignorant of his own state, since every thing is best known by what it doth and produces, he lays before them a catalogue, first, of *works of the flesh* ; then, in the text, of *fruits of the Spirit* : for he will not honour with the latter name *the unfruitful works of darkness* *. The former, he saith, *are manifest* ; it being easy for persons themselves, and all about them, to see if they are grossly wicked. But whether indeed we are truly good, is a matter much less obvious ; but of too great consequence, both to our direction and our comfort, not to be examined with the most accurate care.

For this purpose then I shall at present endeavour,

I. To explain, as far as is necessary, the nature of the several virtues mentioned in the text :

II. To shew in what sense, and how far they are the *fruits of the Spirit* :

III. To lay before you the meaning and importance of that expression, that *against such there is no law.*

I. To explain the nature of the several virtues mentioned in the text : where probably the apostle did not intend to make out a complete list of Christian graces, but to specify those only, on which it was most necessary to fix the minds of the persons to whom he wrote. The rest would be understood by parity of reason, or further instruction, if they were not already ; and had they been all crowded together, the multiplicity would have distracted their thoughts too much.

Now, the duties of which mankind in general want to be reminded the ofteneft, and of which the *Galatians* particularly wanted to be reminded then, were those of kind and charitable

* Eph. v. 11.

ritable dispositions and behaviour one towards another. They were engaged in a warm dispute upon the question, which I began with mentioning. Each side would be in danger, as is always the case, of using the opposite ill: the judaizing, which was the major part, of treating the advocates for liberty, as profane enemies to the law of *Moses*; these, of treating them in return, as tyrants, and imposers of a yoke unnecessary and hurtful. But Christianity requires meekness towards all men, especially to such as do wrong through error of judgment, be it ever so greatly. And therefore St. *Paul*, after charging as many as were persuaded of their liberty, so to stand fast in it, as not to abuse it, points out, in the very next words, that abuse against which it was most needful to guard: *But by love serve one another.*

Suitably to this, the same virtue stands first in the catalogue, with which the text presents us; where it might indeed comprehend love to God, *the first and great commandment* *; but, by what precedes and follows, appears rather to signify love to our fellow-creatures. Now this duty needs but little explanation. We all know it consists in good will to every one, to be shewn, so far as we have opportunity, by every method which is consistent with other obligations; and in good opinion and esteem of every one, so far as they give us a just ground for it: which virtues would so effectually direct us right in the whole of our mutual behaviour, that the apostle hath, with very good reason, assured us, but a few verses before, that *all the law*, meaning all which relates to social conduct, *is fulfilled in one word, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself* †.

However, placing the same object in various lights, gives a fuller view of each part of it: This therefore he proceeds to do. And the first view, in which he represents *love*, is expressed by the word *joy*. Now, if the former be understood to comprehend love to God, the latter will very naturally signify (as it elsewhere doth), taking pleasure in the persuasion of his present and future favour. But if the one be confined to our fellow-creatures, the other must also; and then it will mean, delighting in their good, spiritual and temporal,

* Matt. xxii. 38.

† Gal. v. 14.

suitably to the character given in another epistle of *charity*, the same word with *love* in the original, that it *rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth**; and to that description of *the kingdom of God*, as ruling in the heart, which a third epistle exhibits to us, that it consists in *righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost*†; that is, in the communications which he hath made of his gifts and graces, to others as well as to ourselves; the very opposite temper to those *envyings*, that are enumerated, just before the text, amongst *the works of the flesh*.

The word *peace* also, which follows next, may signify peace with God, and consequently within our own breasts; but is determined by the others on each side, rather to signify, principally if not solely, a peaceable temper and conduct towards all around us. *Long-suffering* too, sometimes means patience under afflictions; but here, more especially, under provocations and injuries. *Gentleness, goodness, and meekness*, are virtues, which men, how little soever they practise them, understand very well, and therefore need not have explained to them.

Faith, indeed, is a more ambiguous term. Most commonly it denotes a persuasion, speculative or practical, of divine truths; the latter of which is the foundation, both of our obedience to God, and of our acceptance with him. But sometimes it relates to what passes amongst men in society; and thus it signifies faithfulness, or such a principle as we may securely have faith in, and dependence upon; which it may very well signify here, for nothing is of greater importance in human affairs. And yet, as the apostle seems intent on recounting the good-natured, rather than the merely useful virtues, faith, or belief, may mean in the text, if ever it doth any where else, due readiness to be persuaded of what makes in favour of persons; as we are told of charity, in that description of it which I just now mentioned, that it *believeth all things, hopeth all things*.

The only remaining virtue is *temperance*, or self-command. For the original word is by no means so confined, as that by which we translate it, is in common use; but extends to the governing,

* 1 Cor. xiii. 6.

† Rom. xiv. 17.

governing, and preserving within its proper bounds, every movement of our hearts, not only towards pleasure, but wealth, honours, resentment; any thing, indeed, which can either entice or provoke us to act injuriously. Now, in this general sense, it most fitly concludes and completes the list. For, whatever good inclinations we may have, we shall fail greatly of being such as we ought in the community of mankind, if we indulge any mischievous ones along with them. And those which are called the gay vices, produce as great, perhaps greater and acuter misery in the world, than downright malice; nay, the irregularities by which men are said to hurt no one but themselves, always hurt many besides. Or could these things be otherwise, which they cannot, the design of religion is to prevent all hurt to ourselves, as well as others; to make us happy, as well as harmless; happy in the next life, as well as the present. And we shall never be either, but by the practice of those virtues, which, the apostle here tells us, are *the fruits of the Spirit*. I shall now proceed,

II. To shew you in what sense, and how far they are such.

As, in several places of the New Testament, the word *flesh* denotes the law of *Moses*, a great part of which stood only in carnal ordinances*; so *the Spirit* likewise often denotes the purer and sublimer dispensation of the gospel†; which is also said, more than once, to *yield* or *bring forth fruit*‡; and undoubtedly the same fruit with that in the text. But, in this chapter, the word *flesh* hath plainly, as I have observed to you, a very bad sense; and cannot possibly signify the law; nor *the works of the flesh*, the works of the law; nor consequently can *the Spirit*, which is the opposite term, signify here the doctrines or precepts of Christianity. Some therefore, understanding rightly by *the flesh* a sinful disposition, have understood by *the Spirit* merely a Christian one; and by *the fruits of the Spirit*, the effects of that disposition. But indeed the good qualities which you have heard explained, are the several parts, not the effects of a Christian temper: and to call them the fruit which it bears, when they are indeed the ingredients of which it is composed, would surely be an improper manner of speaking. Others again, by *the Spirit*

B b 2

understand

* Heb. ix. 10.

† Gal. iii. 3.

‡ Mark iv. 8. Col. i. 6.

understand only the rational principle within us. And by that name, indeed, the scripture often calls it. But then the scripture never ascribes Christian virtues and graces to human reason alone, as the productive cause of them. So that, after all, the common interpretation is much the best. The Spirit meant is the Spirit of God: our bad qualities are from ourselves, our good ones from above. Our Saviour hath told us, that *as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can we, except we abide in him**. And as our union to him, and entrance into the kingdom of God, or gospel state, is first made by being *born of water and of the Spirit*†, elsewhere called *the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost*‡; so it is, *through the same Spirit dwelling in us*, that we must ever after *mortify the deeds of the body*§, and *be strengthened with might in the inner man*||. Every Christian virtue therefore proceeds from the *fellowship or communion of the Holy Ghost*¶; the communication and partaking of his influences. For *if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his*** . And as we ought to pray for *the Holy Spirit*, which *our heavenly Father will give to them that ask him*††; we must also be duly thankful for the gift; and ascribe the good actions that we are able to do, not to ourselves, *but to the grace of God which is with us*‡‡. *We are not sufficient to think any thing, as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God*§§.

We have, indeed, originally more or less of right disposition, either remaining in us notwithstanding the fall, or restored to mankind after it, which prompts us to many imperfect instances of right behaviour; whence the apostle speaks of *the Gentiles, as doing by nature the things contained in the law*|||. But then we must remember, first, that this and all our powers are the gift of God; and secondly, that the best of our natural powers do not enable us to fulfill duly the law of Christ, without the inward motions of the Holy Spirit; as, on the other hand, his motions may prove ineffectual too, if we *resist*¶¶ or *quench**** them; if we neglect to work

out

* John xv. 4.

† John iii. 5.

‡ Tit. iii. 5.

§ Rom. viii. 13.

|| Eph. iii. 16.

¶ 2 Cor. xiii. 14.

** Rom. viii. 9.

†† Luke xi. 13.

‡‡ 1 Cor. xv. 10.

§§ 2 Cor. iii. 5.

||| Rom. ii. 14.

¶¶ Acts vii. 51.

*** 1 Thess. v. 19.

out our own salvation with the strength which he gives us, instead of being encouraged to it, as we certainly ought, by his *working in us both to will and to do* *.

Our own endeavours then being still necessary; and, if used in humble dependence on God, certain of success, there can be no objection from reason against this doctrine. Nor is it any real one from experience, that we have seldom, if at all, an immediate and distinct perception of these influences. For our fellow-creatures influence us often very strongly, without our perceiving it; much more then may the Almighty. And that the operations of his power, in the works of grace, should be secret, and silent, and commonly gradual, is by no means improbable, since they are so in the works of nature. This gives occasion in each for the thoughtless to forget God, but for the considerate to admire him the more; who, by a slow and imperceptible progress, for the most part, brings to perfection *the fruits of the Spirit*, as he doth those of the earth; and the former, if due cultivation be not wanting, with infallible success; *filling the heart* of the Christian always, as well as of the husbandman usually, *with food and gladness* †. How very great cause for gladness a sense of being *filled with these fruits of righteousness* affords men, will appear from proceeding

III. To lay before you the meaning and importance of that expression in the text, that *against such there is no law*.

Of these words it is a very true sense, that the practisers of the gospel virtues have, generally speaking, nothing to fear from human laws; and a very material sense, considering what severe punishment are frequently incurred by the contrary vices: on which account St. Peter justly asks, *Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good* ‡? But this, though a right meaning in itself, comes far short of the apostle's meaning; which is, that whereas the law of nature requires obedience, without giving any certainty of pardon and acceptance on whatever terms, after disobeying; and *the law of Moses being added, because of transgressions* §; that is, partly to convince men of their transgressions, partly to restrain them from transgressing, increased

both

* Phil. ii. 12, 13.

† Acts xiv. 17.

‡ 1 Pet. iii. 13.

§ Gal. iii. 19.

both the number of duties and the fear of punishment, but afforded only obscure hopes, either of assistance or forgiveness: the gospel of Christ was revealed, in God's due time, to relieve mankind, on most equitable conditions, from the rigour of the other two; supplying the promise of mercy after failures; taking off the heavy yoke of ritual observances; producing in men the good dispositions required; and expressly assuring them, that a perfect obedience would not be expected, but a faithful and sincere one be sufficient, in order to obtain eternal happiness. *Against such* therefore, as thus possess and exercise the several Christian graces, *there is no law*. For them there is a law to direct and reward them; against them there is none to sentence and punish them. The strict demand of the covenant of works is relaxed; the burden of the Mosaic ordinances is removed; and *the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made them free from the law of sin and death* *. Still, indeed, they are subject to the law, which gave them this freedom; *they are created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained, that they should walk in them* †. But this the apostle considers as a privilege, not a servitude; a privilege, however, necessary to be used; and therefore he expresses very distinctly the nature of it. *There is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit* ‡. *For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace* §.

Here then is the plain trial of our condition. If we are destitute of *the fruits of the Spirit*, it is bad: if we find them in our hearts and lives, we have proof enough of its being good; and need never disquiet ourselves for want of any other. Being able to tell the very moment when we became pious and virtuous, is not material, provided we are so now: and happiest of all are they, who remember not themselves ever to have been otherwise. A feeling of immediate and sensible assurances of God's favour, so impressed upon us, that we can certainly distinguish it to be of divine original, from the manner in which it affects us, may be often vouchsafed, but is no where in scripture made necessary: and all feelings are

* Rom. viii. 2.

† Eph. ii. 10.

‡ Rom. viii. 1.

§ Ibid. 6.

are imaginary and deceitful, unless they be accompanied with that one, which the apostle experienced and mentions: *For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity, and godly sincerity, we have had our conversation in the world* *. Our Saviour's rule, of *knowing every tree by its fruit* †, is the only sure way to judge of ourselves, as well as others. And though perhaps we may be sometimes at a loss how to judge; or inclined, and even strongly, to fear the worst; yet, if this arise, not from presumptuous sins, or habitual negligence, but merely from excessive humility or weakness of spirits, a modest diffidence will never hinder our future happiness, nor will a bold positiveness ever forward it. Good men may be cast down, and bad men elevated, without any reason. The former may see much in themselves to dislike, and yet God may see enough of what he approves, to accept them: they may experience but little joy in serving him, and yet *walk more completely worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing* ‡, for doing it without the encouragement of a present reward. The latter, on the other hand, may build upon groundless fancies of their own, mistaking them for divine communications; may be absolutely confident, wonderfully transported, yet find themselves at last fatally deceived. It is not therefore by their fears, or their hopes, or their raptures, that men are to judge of their spiritual condition. *Hereby, saith St. John, we do know that we know God, if we keep his commandments* §. *Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doth righteousness, is righteous: he that committeth sin is of the devil* ||.

But then we shall miserably cheat ourselves, if we take that for righteousness which is not, or one part of it for the whole. If we mistake a constitutional, or perhaps affected good-nature, shewn, it may be, to extravagance on some occasions, and not at all on others, for Christian love, which comprehends every act of justice and mercy; if, with ever so extensive a benevolence to our fellow-creatures, we fail of governing ourselves by the rules of sobriety, temperance and chastity, or thinking of ourselves with due *lowliness of mind* ¶;

if,

* 2 Cor. i. 12.

† Luke vi. 44.

‡ Col. i. 10.

§ 1 John ii. 3.

|| 1 John iii. 7, 8.

¶ Phil. ii. 3.

If, with the practice of all these duties, we omit the worship of God our Maker, or perform it without inward reverence and affection, or live without an humble sense of our constant dependence upon him; nay, if we pay him all the honour which unassisted reason enjoins, but wilfully reject, or contemptuously slight, the doctrines or precepts of revelation, or any one of them; or if, professing to receive and observe them all, we are not careful to improve ourselves by them into a Christian frame of mind, with respect both to this world and the next; or if, lastly, with what diligence soever we may labour in every good work, we are not sensible that we can neither succeed without the assistance of God's Spirit, nor be accepted but for the merits of his Son, we must not imagine, that he who hath prescribed every article of faith and duty, from knowing them all to be necessary in our case, will permit us to disregard such of them as we shall please, without pronouncing us unworthy of the salvation which he hath offered, and inflicting on us the punishments which he hath threatened. Let every one therefore think, and think most seriously, whether he is indeed such as God requires, in all these particulars; and study to amend, not to flatter himself.

It is very true, *the fruits of the Spirit*, mentioned in the text, seem to be wholly moral virtues, and almost wholly those of mutual kindness and humanity. Nor will any rightness of belief, or fervency of devotion, or strictness of life avail us, if we want social goodness and beneficence. But still these last, as the scripture most evidently shews, are not the only fruits of the Spirit; and therefore we must learn to practise other virtues from other texts, as well as the benevolent virtues from this. It is indeed said, that *against* the observers of *these there is no law*. But then they are supposed to act consistently; to observe every thing else at the same time, that stands on the same foundation, else they observe not even these from the right principle; nor will they be able to observe them in a sufficient degree. Every virtue is connected with every other; and all virtue with piety. For without the love of God to excite us, and the fear of God to restrain us, and the word of God to direct us, and the grace of God to strengthen us, we shall neither behave to our fellow-creatures,



tures, nor govern ourselves, in a proper manner. *What therefore be bath joined together, let not us put asunder* * : but giving all diligence, add to our faith virtue, or manly boldness in professing it ; and to virtue, knowledge of whatever may adorn and defend it ; and to knowledge, temperance ; and to temperance, patience ; and to patience, godliness ; and to godliness, brotherly kindness towards our fellow-Christians ; and to brotherly kindness, charity towards all men without exception †. For so an entrance shall be administered unto us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ ‡ : to which may God, for his sake, bring us all. Amen.

* Matth. xix. 6.

† 2 Pet. i. 5, 6, 7.

‡ Ibid ii.

S E R M O N CXI.

GOOD MEN HAVE THE EVIDENCE IN THEIR OWN BREAST
THAT GOD AIDS AND LOVES THEM.

ROM. viii. 16.

*The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are
the children of God.*

WHOEVER believes religion to be true, and thinks with any seriousness concerning it, must needs be earnestly desirous to find out, whether the state of his mind, and the course of his life, be such as God expects and will reward, or forbids and will punish. Now this depends on two things; an acquaintance with ourselves, and with the disposition of our Maker. *The spirit of man, which is in him, knoweth the things of a man* *; and may also clearly see, from the creation of the world, the invisible things of the author of it, even his eternal power and godhead †; those attributes of his nature, by which his proceedings towards his creatures will be directed. But still the holy scripture teaches, that the Spirit of God likewise bears a part, highly necessary, in the great work of discovering what title we have to the mercy and favour of heaven. It will therefore be requisite to consider this important subject, in the manner which St. Paul hath pointed out to us in the text: and, for this end, I shall endeavour to shew you,

I. What is implied in being *the children of God*.

II. How far *our own spirit* is capable of bearing witness that we are such.

III. What

* 1 Cor. ii. 11.

† Rom. i. 20.

III. What additional *witness* to it *the Divine Spirit* may bear.

I. What is implied in being *the children of God*.

All beings, endued with moral qualifications, and the ability of looking up to the Fountain of Perfection, are, in a large sense of the word, the children of him who is *the Father of Spirits* *, being *made in his image* †. But as the capacity of resembling him is the very foundation of their guilt, who, instead of improving, wear out the traces of this divine similitude; so they alone are, to any beneficial purpose, *the children of their Father in heaven* ‡, who, by imitating his holiness and goodness, continue objects of his paternal affection. For that all pious and virtuous persons are thus related to him, our common reason perceives in general; but the more distinct apprehension of the nature, and duties, and benefits of this relation, we owe to scripture.

There we learn, that God created man *after his likeness* §, not only in respect of *righteousness and true holiness* ||, but also of happiness and immortality: that the lamentable transgression of our first parents forfeited, for themselves and us, the privileges which depended on their innocence: and that being all become, by their fault, prone to sin, we become, by our own, more or less actually guilty of it: that the bulk of mankind, forsaking God entirely, made themselves *aliens and strangers* ¶ to him, and *children of that wicked one* **, whose suggestions they chose to obey, and whose temper to copy. But our gracious Maker, pitying even those who were *enemies* to him and their own souls, *by wicked works* ††, and having formed from the beginning a scheme of mysterious wisdom for recovering them again to their duty, and receiving them back into his family, gave them, from time to time, both such admonitions and such promises, for that intent, as he saw their condition required, and the state of their minds would bear; manifesting to them various degrees and proportions of goodness in this respect, as he doth in all others, both to man, and the rest of his creatures, for unsearchable reasons.

C c 2

To

* Heb. xii. 9.

† Gen. i. 26.

‡ Matth. v. 45.

§ Gen. i. 26.

¶ Eph. iv. 24.

¶ Eph. ii. 12.

** Matth. xiii. 38.

†† Col. i. 21.

To those, whom in the course of his providence he left to be directed merely by the light of their own consciences, he certainly did no injury. For as many as in any part of their conduct followed that, and *did by nature the things contained in the law* *, were so far *followers of God as dear children* †. And so many as, having departed from the right way, penitently returned to it, had always some ground to hope for pardon from our merciful Father, who *knoweth whereof we are made* ‡. But they who preserved but the faintest beam of outward revelation also, which at first was universal, to guide their steps and brighten the prospect before them, had much fuller proofs of his parental kindness. And the Jews being favoured with his miraculous protection, and a written law delivered by him, and prophetic instructions superadded, in some measure for the benefit of the Gentile world, as well as their own, he saith of them, in terms of great distinction, *Israel is my son, even my first-born* §. Yet still, as that nation, though wise and good in comparison of others round them, was both in the knowledge and practice of religion very imperfect, and far from maturity, God thought it needful, while he treated them on that account with indulgence on some points, to exercise in many so strict and severe a government over them, that he rather appeared in the character of a Master than a Father, trying to influence them more by the terror of present punishment than the hope of a future inheritance. And therefore St. Paul expresses their case, with much accuracy, thus : *Now, I say, that the heir, so long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all ; but is under tutors and governors, until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fulness of time was come ;* when the Jews were gradually qualified to have a more manly and rational form of religion proposed to them, with more ingenuous motives to the practice of it ; when the Gentiles also had received some preparatory cultivation, in their understandings and their manners, from the purer parts of their philosophy, which yet had fully appeared to be insufficient for the reformation of mankind ;

and

* Rom. ii. 14.

† Eph. v. 1.

‡ Pl. ciii. 14.

§ Exod. iv. 22.

and when so free a communication was opened between distant parts of the world, that the truth of the gospel might easily be examined, and its doctrines easily spread, then God sent forth his Son, to redeem them who were under the law, that they might receive the adoption of sons *; to purchase, at the price of his blood, their deliverance from the condemning sentence, and the ritual injunctions of the Mosaic dispensation, that they might enjoy, under the Christian covenant, the strongest marks of God's fatherly regard; and to purchase, at the same time, the deliverance of the Gentiles from an infinitely worse bondage, that of corruption, the slavery of sin, and the dread of eternal death, into the glorious liberty of the children of God †.

Thus then did all mankind regain a title to this blessed denomination; the only begotten Son of God condescending to partake of our nature, that we, being thus become his brethren ‡, might partake of the divine nature §. By his incarnation and death, he gave to them, who believed on his name, to use St. John's expression, power, or right, to become the sons of God ||: by instructing us in our duty, he hath furnished us with the outward means of becoming such; by the influence of his Holy Spirit, thence called the Spirit of Adoption ¶, he enables and excites us inwardly to make effectual use of those means; and comforts us with a joyful sense of having done it, and of being authorised to claim the rank of God's children, or, in St. Paul's language, to cry *Abba, Father* ¶; a phrase, in which the Jewish bond-servants might not presume to address their masters **. The same happy change is represented sometimes by the figure of a new birth or creation; the dispositions and privileges acquired in it being such, as may well denominate us new creatures, born again to a new life. And as all Christians receive from God in baptism whatever is requisite on his part for this change, and profess to act suitably to his goodness, they are so far justly said to be regenerated and begotten of him. But if afterwards they act otherwise, in this are manifest the children of God, and the children of the devil: whosoever doth not
righteousness,

* Gal. iv. 4, 5.

† Rom. viii. 21.

‡ Heb. ii. 11.

§ 2 Pet. i. 4.

|| John i. 12.

¶ Rom. viii. 15.

** Seld. de Succ. in bona Def. c. 4.

righteousness, is not of God *. None but religious and virtuous persons then are effectually *begotten again to an inheritance in heaven* †: and of these only, the apostle's reasoning was intended to hold, *If children, then heirs* ‡. For as by ceasing to be like God in purity and holiness, our first parents and we ceased to be like him in happiness and immortality, so by returning in the first of these respects to his image, exhibited to us in the person of our dear Redeemer, we shall be restored to it in the latter also; and as we have borne the image of the earthly man, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly §. It is indeed appointed unto all men once to die ||; but we shall not continue under this sentence of the Lord over all flesh ¶; but, rising again to an endless life, become, in the completest sense, as our Saviour argues, *the children of God, being the children of the resurrection* **. Behold then, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God. Beloved now are we the sons of God: and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him ††. We do not indeed, and probably cannot conceive distinctly, the nature of our future state; but this general description, that we shall be like him, comprehends every thing that we can wish. And be we ever so ignorant of the particulars of what we shall enjoy, it is happiness unspeakable to think only from what we shall be freed; when God, as he hath promised, shall wipe away all tears from our eyes; and there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain ††. It follows in the same place of scripture: *And he, that sat upon the throne, said, These words are true and faithful. He that overcometh, shall inherit all things: and I will be his God, and he shall be my son* §§.

Since therefore such great privileges are implied in being *the children of God*, let us now inquire,

II. How far our own spirit is capable of bearing witness that we are such.

The prophet indeed hath said very truly, *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*

* 1 John. iii. 10

† 1 Pet. i. 3, 4.

‡ Rom. viii. 17.

§ 1 Cor. xv. 49.

|| Heb. ix. 27.

¶ Eccles. xii. 3.

** Luke xx 36.

†† 1 John iii. 1, 2.

‡‡ Rev. xxi. 4.

§§ Ver. v. 7.

it *? But though it be often extremely difficult to find out the dispositions and intentions of other men, when they are bad (because in such cases all arts of concealment are used, and we can sometimes conceal things very strangely even from ourselves), yet with a good will we may discern ourselves tolerably well. Of our own deliberate actions we cannot but be conscious at the time: our intentions, if we examine them, will be no impenetrable secret to us. And that uncertain state of mind, in which we have either no formed intention, or several not very consistent, each of us may discover to be just what it is. Then for our past conduct; though many particulars may have been forgotten by us, yet its general turn and complexion we can certainly recollect if we please. And whoever doth but take some honest pains, after this, to compare what he hath been and is, with what his conscience and the word of God informed him he should be, will not fail of being competently acquainted with his own condition. Indeed no one doubts but he can know himself in other respects: whether, for instance, he honours his parents, and loves his friends, and desires to perform his duty towards them; and why then should he despair of knowing whether he honours and loves God, and serves him with sincerity?

But many have no mind to do his will, and yet a great mind to believe themselves in his favour. Now undoubtedly such may *deceive their own hearts* †, especially at times, with much ease. But they might also, if they were inclined to it, undeceive them again very soon, by putting proper questions home to themselves; by carrying it in mind, that their interest is to search out the real truth: and by endeavouring to consider their own case, as if it were that of another, for whom they had no partial tenderness. Some again are at a loss concerning their spiritual state, because they are uncertain about such or such points of their duty. But as these will not often be many or important, so if they were, by making proper application, they may receive satisfaction. And in the mean time, without knowing which opinion is right, they may know whether personally they are innocent

or

* Jer. xvii. 9.

† James i. 26.

or excusable, by reflecting, whether they have taken such care, as their circumstances permit, to inform themselves and judge as well as they could, whether they violate no plain obligations for the sake of doubtful ones; and whether, in all matters of obscurity, they keep to the safer side.

There is yet a third sort of people, and much to be pitied, who labour, with the utmost solicitude, to do every thing they should, and yet enjoy no manner of comfort. Sometimes they will even deny, that they are at all in earnest about religion; though their concern, at imagining they are not, is a full proof that they are. And this arises generally from a disorder in the body, affecting the mind; of which, however, it is exceedingly hard to convince them, because, it may be, they are otherwise tolerably in health. But if happily they can be brought, though against their own persuasion, to take medicinal advice, the relief which they commonly find, shews, by experience, where the defect lay. Sometimes again their uneasiness, though ill-grounded, proceeds from a different cause. They read, in devotional books, confessions of sin, acknowledging such heinous degrees of guilt as too many have incurred, but they have not: however, they repeat the whole inconsiderately, though much of it was intended only for others; and so, by accusing themselves of what they have never done, come to fancy themselves what they never were. And a further mistake, too frequent, is, that the pious authors of such treatises, expressing for the most part very warmly, in the prayers composed by them, those devout affections, of which they probably felt an unusual share, persons, not liable by nature to such strong emotions, imagine themselves totally destitute of real piety. Or if they were formerly fervent in sacred exercises, and now, as they go on towards the decline of their days, are less so, they grow suspicious, that whatever vigour and life there was once in their profession of religion, it is all gone, and their case become bad, perhaps desperate. And thus, while the general fault of mankind is to have much ground for fear, and yet no fear at all, these poor wretches, often with no ground for any, have more than they are able to support.

Now, where this proceeds, in any considerable measure, from constitution, their own thinking and reading upon the
subject

subject will but make bad worse; and others arguing with them about it, though ever so rightly, will not make things much better. The only effectual way therefore is, to prevail on them, if possible, to have some little regard for the judgment of serious and prudent friends, though in opposition to their own, till they can use it better; and suffer their thoughts to be turned for a time, whilst other means are using, to things of smaller importance, and even of harmless amusement. For the strong exertion either of a mind or body, originally weak, or accidentally over-strained, will only produce a still worse feebleness. Moderate relaxation therefore is, in these circumstances, a real duty, how apt soever the parties concerned may be to look on it as a sin; for which reason it ought to be recommended with great prudence and caution. But on the other hand, it must not be conceived, that all concern of men about their spiritual state proceeds from bodily indisposition; for this would be a fatal mistake. There may be, and God knows frequently is, but too much foundation for such concern; and then the sole cure is earnest prayer for pardon and grace, and diligent study of better obedience. Or if there be no just foundation, the appearance of the contrary may flow wholly or chiefly from erroneous notions, which can only be overcome by suitable arguments. And these errors indeed are various; but as they principally relate to the articles of repentance, faith, and love to God, so the following considerations will go far towards removing them: that whatever faults people heartily wish, from a sense of duty to their Maker, Redeemer and Sanctifier, they had never committed, and take effectual care never to commit again designedly, they have as truly repented of them as possible; and whether their sorrow were ever so calm or ever so passionate, makes no essential difference: that a true faith in Christ is known by its fruits; and if it purifies the soul and life, however weak, is undoubtedly genuine: that love to God, as well as man, consists, not in extasies and transports, of which bad persons may have strange fits, and good ones little or nothing, but in a steady exercise of real regard and right behaviour to the object of our affection.

By these means then we may all be enabled to judge, in a considerable measure, what manner of men we have been and are ; for this depends on the proper use of our faculties concerning a point within our reach. But the further question, How God will deal with such, is one of a quite different sort ; to which reason unassisted can return but a very general and indeterminate answer. Blameless creatures, indeed, are secure of their Creator's kindness ; but in what degree, or for what duration, even they of themselves cannot know. Much less then may sinners, as we are, presume to indulge high hopes of our own forming, when we have so much cause for dread and fearful expectation. It is true, repentance and amendment, if they proceed from right principles, do renew in us the image of our heavenly Father, so far as they go ; and his goodness will not permit us to despair of his returning children being received by him. But whether our return, after the offences that we have committed, be such as he can accept ; or if it be, what correction he may first inflict upon us in a life to come ; to what rank in his family he may then vouchsafe to re-admit us ; or how long or how little a time he may continue to us the being which we have forfeited, our own spirit can never teach us with any certainty. And therefore it concerns us, beyond expression, to inquire,

III. What additional *witness* the Divine Spirit bears that we are the children of God.

Now, having originally borne witness in the strongest manner, to the truth of the gospel, by his predictions of it before it appeared, and his miraculous operations attending the delivery of it to the world, he bears irrefragable witness by consequence to every succeeding age, that all, who sincerely believe and obey it, are, notwithstanding their former sins, and present imperfections, *washed white in the blood of the Lamb, and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them** : they shall be led, by his paternal care, in safety, through all the temptations and difficulties of this world, and inherit, in the world to come, a blessed immortality in their Father's house. Then, besides this general testimony, the Holy Spirit hath

* Rev. vii. 14, 15.

hath attested more especially a truth of infinite importance to us, and much doubted by the first Christians for some years, that the Gentile world hath an equal right to God's promises with the Jews; of which it was an early and full proof, that he imparted his gifts and graces to both equally, *putting no difference between them**. And this, in all likelihood, is what St. Paul more peculiarly designed to assert in the text. But the Spirit not only gives these external evidences of our acceptance, but assists us inwardly to know our true state towards God, of which we might else be often fatally ignorant. And for this reason David prays so earnestly, *Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my heart; prove me, and examine my thoughts. Look well, if there be any way of wickedness in me; and lead me in the way everlasting*†. For the same Spirit, after shewing us what we are, enables us, by his influences, to become what we should be. For *we are not sufficient of ourselves even to think any thing*‡ with effect; but by his co-operation we come to have the only sure argument, that we in particular are the children of God. The virtues and graces of a good heart and life are that distinguishing mark of true Christians, on account of which they are said in scripture to be *sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance*§. For as our happiness hereafter shall consist in the same temper in which our duty consists now, he who is really, though imperfectly, possessed of that temper, hath already received *the first fruits of the Spirit*||; and tasted, in some measure, of what he shall enjoy abundantly. Whoever therefore *walks not after the flesh, but after the Spirit*¶, having his conversation such as becomes the gospel of Christ**, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made him free from the law of sin and death††; and of this he hath the witness in himself†††, if he will attend to it. Else, indeed, a timorous disposition, or a feeble body affecting the mind, may disquiet him: but still, ever so great fears will no more endanger the salvation of a good man, than ever so great assurance will prevent the punishment of a wicked one. If any one is inclined then to suspicions and apprehensions

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concerning

* Acts xv. 9.

† Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.

‡ 2 Cor. iii. 5.

§ Eph. i. 13, 14.

|| Rom. viii. 23.

¶ Rom. viii. 1.

** Phil. i. 27.

†† Rom. viii. 2.

††† 1 John v. 10.

concerning his title to God's favour, without knowing why ; or can charge himself with nothing, when he sets about it, but such defects and failures, as the scripture shews, and persons of known piety and discretion can assure him, are consistent with a state of religion, let him reject such imaginations entirely, if he is able. If he is not, let him bear them as afflictions, but never yield to them as truths ; or fancy, on account of such things, that his condition is bad, and God hath forsaken him. For there can hardly be a surer proof to the contrary, than that God preserves his conscience tender, and his life clear of wilful sin.

As to that reviving comfort and delightful satisfaction, which people of this turn complain they do not experience, and are apt erroneously to consider as the only favourable witness of the Spirit, it is indeed sometimes a present reward, which God bestows on his servants. But no safe conclusion can be drawn from the most agreeable of these perceptions, without a faithful care to serve him ; and they, who go on to serve him faithfully without any of them, give a more acceptable demonstration of the sincerity of their zeal, than if they enjoyed them all the while in the highest degree. For equal obedience, with less encouragement, is certainly of the most value. When therefore he who best knows, judges it needful, you shall partake of those religious pleasures that you desire. But in the mean while believe, as you have cause, that withholding them is for your benefit ; and indeed be assured of this, that both having them, and being destitute of them, proceeds very much from natural constitution, or the different temperature of different ages of life, or from using or not using particular methods of devotion, which have small connection with essential goodness. Accordingly, many a one, who seldom or never feels much of any consolations within, that warm him very sensibly, and move his passions very powerfully, may have, notwithstanding, on most solid grounds, a calm and composed satisfaction and *joy in the Holy Ghost* * ; which *shall be in him*, to use our Saviour's words, *a well of water, springing up into everlasting life* † ; and perhaps many another, who hath often been full of inexpressible transports,

* Rom. xiv. 17.

† John iv. 14.

transports, will find himself at last fatally deceived by a vain confidence. For the dictates of a heated fancy, be they ever so positive, can do nothing to counterbalance the guilt of a sinful life; and all persuasions to the contrary, are not from the Divine Comforter, but our own bad hearts, or the wicked one. *For the Holy Spirit of discipline will remove from thoughts that are without understanding; and will not abide, when unrighteousness cometh in**. He never leads us to any sentiment or action but what reason and scripture warrant; nor can any assurance that we may imagine he communicates to us, of our belonging to God, continue well-founded one moment longer than we continue keeping God's commandments: which therefore that we may all do always, he of his infinite mercy grant, &c.

* Wisd. i. 5.

S E R M O N CXII.

ON THE PROPER OBSERVANCE OF THE SABBATH.

GEN. ii. 3.

And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because that in it he had rested from all his work, which God created and made.

THESE words contain the account of that original appropriation of one day in seven to the purposes of religion, from which all subsequent appointments of the same nature have been derived. And therefore I shall take occasion from them to shew, God willing, in three discourses,

I. On what authority the observation of a weekly day of public devotion and rest is founded.

II. In what manner that day ought to be spent.

I. On what authority it is founded.

It is not only our duty to address God in private prayer, but also to assemble ourselves together, in order to offer up to him our united devotions. As we are by nature formed for society, we ought to be social in religion as well as in other instances. As we are all dependent for every thing we have or hope for on the same Almighty Being, the Creator and Governor of the Universe, we ought all to join in openly acknowledging that dependence, in begging, with one voice, the supply of our common wants, the forgiveness of our common offences, the removal of our common calamities, and in returning thanks for the various mercies which we have in common received from our heavenly benefactor. But besides this, public worship is of all other things the best calculated both to cherish in ourselves, and by the powerful force of sympathy and example, to excite in others the warmest sentiments

ments of piety and virtue. Indeed without it (as both reason and experience prove) mankind would gradually lose all sense of religion; and without that, the lower part of them would quickly sink into the grossest depravity of mind, and profligacy of manners.

Joining in family-devotions might indeed, in some degree, guard against these mischiefs, and answer the other good ends above-mentioned: and large families may be considered almost in the same light with small parishes. But family-devotions are shamefully neglected; and, were they universally kept up, they could seldom be expected to convey so much knowledge, and would scarce ever produce in the mind so strong a feeling, that whole neighbourhoods and nations are members of one body, as the offices performed in more numerous assemblies do.

Since therefore, on these accounts, there must be public worship and instruction, it is not only useful, but necessary, that there should be also fixed times appointed for it by sufficient authority: for were it left at large to be performed at any time, there is but too much reason to fear that it would be frequently delayed or neglected, and at last perhaps wholly thrown aside. But how much and what time should be devoted to this employment, if God had given no intimation of his will, every society must have determined for themselves; and in all likelihood would have determined very differently. For the imagined mysteries and excellencies of the number seven, would probably have been no more regarded than those of other numbers, which have as good a claim; at least they would never have influenced even the speculative part, much less the bulk of mankind, to any such purpose as this. And even supposing they could have known farther (which, without revelation, they could not), that God had ceased on the seventh day from his work of creation, that alone had been no evidence, that man ought to cease every seventh day from his ordinary labour, and spend it in religious exercises. A divine direction therefore must be extremely serviceable, both to prevent all doubts how much time would be enough, and to secure a general agreement in the particular time. For if several sorts of persons observed perhaps all the several days of the week, this diversity, were it to obtain only in different
I nations,

nations, would be inconvenient; but in the same, would obstruct business to a degree almost insupportable.

Now, such a direction from above seems to have been vouchsafed in the very beginning of the world. For when we read in the text, and the verse preceding it, that *on the seventh day God ended his work, and therefore blessed the day, and sanctified it*; that is, assigned to it the honourable distinction of preserving the memory of his having created all things, the obvious interpretation is, that this appointment took place from the time that the reason for it took place, from the time at which it is introduced in the sacred history, and not from that of the Jewish deliverance from *Egypt*, two thousand five hundred years after. For it is quite improbable, that *Moses* would both mention the institution of the sabbath so very long before he needed, and mention it in terms that naturally imply its being instituted at the creation, if it was not. Nor is the contrary opinion of some ancient fathers of any weight in this case, and much less that of modern Rabbins. For neither of them had better opportunities for knowing the truth than we have now. And both of them had prejudices to bias their judgment. The former, in disputing against the Jews of that time, were tempted to defend their own practice of not observing the Jewish sabbath, by alleging, that the patriarchs before the law did not observe it. Yet some of them appear to have been of a different opinion*. As to the Rabbins, (though Philo the Jew†, far ancients than any of them, and some of their own number‡, thought the observance of the sabbath as old as the world, yet in general) they magnified themselves in after ages, by pretending that this excellent ordinance was first established in the Hebrew nation. And it is very true, we find no instance of keeping the sabbath before the days of *Moses*. But then, on the other hand, we find not even the name of the sabbath for almost five hundred years after *Moses*, that is, till *David's* reign, and then only once§, and but once again|| for above one hundred years more. Yet no one doubts

* Novatian de Cibis Judaicis, c. 3. faith, Decem sermones illi in tabulis nihil novum docent, sed quod oblitteratum fuerat admonent.

† De Vit. Mos. l. 3. p. 175.

‡ Seld. de In. & G. l. 2. c. 13.

§ 1 Chron. xxiii. 31.

|| 2 Kings iv. 23.

doubts of its being appointed, and in the main observed through that time; and therefore why not in the preceding times also, since there is the same reason to be given for omitting the mention of it in both cases, that the history is short, and comprehends no particulars that made speaking of it necessary?

But still, between the creation and *Moses*, we find not only seven-fold vengeance threatened in the case of *Cain**, and *Noah* taking seven pairs of every clean beast into the ark†, and *Jacob* bowing before *Esau* seven times‡, and both years§ and days|| counted by sevens, and a very particular notice taken of the interval of seven days in the history of the deluge¶. Nay, we find the very name of weeks used** ; which could not well have any other original, than from the institution of keeping the seventh day holy. For there is no obvious foundation in nature for dividing time into weeks, as there is into months and years, from the course of the sun and moon; nor any manner of probability, that in those early ages the period of seven days was introduced from regard to the seven planets, a number which doth not appear to have been known then. For the patriarch *Joseph* reckons eleven principal stars††; and seven are not once named throughout the Old Testament. Indeed, the prophet *Amos*, in our translation, speaks of the seven stars‡‡; but the Hebrew word expresses no number, and certainly doth not mean the planets; and what it doth mean is doubtful; and besides, *Amos* lived seven hundred years after *Moses*. Now, supposing the appointment of observing this day to be made at the creation, it would bind all men, to whose knowledge it came, till it was either in form repealed, or tacitly superseded, by substituting another in its room. Accordingly we find *Job*, who is plainly not represented as a Jew, and is by many thought as early as *Moses*, offering sacrifices at the end of every seven days§§. And perhaps the seventh was that day, on which the sons of God (who, we read, sang together and shouted for joy at the foundation of the earth|||), are said in his history

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to

* Gen. iv. 15.

† Gen. vii. 2, 3.

‡ Gen. xxxiii. 3.

§ Gen. xxix. 18—27. Gen. xli. 27, 29.

|| Gen. i. 10.

¶ Gen. vii. 4, 10. viii. 10, 12.

** Gen. xxxvii. 9.

†† Gen. xxxvii. 9. ‡‡ Amos v. 8. §§ Job i. 2, 4, 5. ||| Job xxxviii. 7.

to present themselves before the Lord *. For it seems plainly to have been a stated day, and we know of no other. Farther still, we find *Balaam* appointing seven altars to be built, and offering on them seven bullocks and seven rams †, three times over; which looks like a memorial of the original seventh day. Very probably, indeed, the generality of mankind, in process of time, forgot the celebration of the Sabbath, as they did the rest of their duty; yet not so entirely, but that a few scattered and obscure footsteps of this, as well as other articles of the primitive religion, remained long afterwards amongst the Heathen. For though a considerable part of the notice which they took of the seventh day, and the period of seven days, might proceed from other causes, one cannot so well think the whole did, as it began so early, and extended so wide ‡.

Possibly the Jews too had, in a great measure, lost the remembrance of the institution, during their bondage in *Egypt* at least; where indeed their attempting to observe it, by not working upon it, would only have exposed them to a larger share of ill treatment; on which account Providence might rather permit it to fall, for a time, into oblivion. Yet when God is said, in *Nehemiah*, to have made *known to them his holy Sabbath by the hand of Moses §*, this doth not, according to the use of the like phrases elsewhere, prove, that they were totally ignorant of it before, much less that their forefathers were. And when *Moses*, in *Exodus*, before the delivery of the law, tells them, *To-morrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath unto the Lord ||*, it appears both from the words themselves, and the time of speaking them, that they are an admonition concerning the revival of an intermitted observance, not an institution of a new one. For why should a commandment be first given in this manner separately then, which was in a month after to be promulged with so much greater solemnity among the rest of the ten, upon Mount *Sinai*?

* Job. i. 6. ii. 1.

† Numb. xxiii. 1, 14, 29.

‡ Yet the seventh day, regarded by many of the Heathen, and which Philo mentions as being so universally regarded by them, was the seventh day of the month. Vid. Carpzovii *Philoniana*. The observation of the seventh day of the week perhaps degenerated into this.

§ Neh. ix. 14.

|| Exod. xvi. 24.

Sinai? But if, on the contrary, it was from the beginning, it might be very proper to remind the people of that, before they heard it joined with the rest by the mouth of God himself. And indeed the other nine being as old as the creation, and obligatory on all men, it seems extremely probable from thence alone, that this, the fourth in number, was so too.

However, the nature of the appointment is more explicitly set forth in *Exodus* than in *Genesis*. Not only sanctification of the day in general, but rest in particular is enjoined; and the injunction is extended not only to servants, but the very cattle. Several reasons for it are also there assigned. The first is the original one, because *God rested on the seventh day*; that is, he ceased from his work, it being accomplished. For *the Creator of the ends of the earth*, as the prophet *Isaiah* justly teaches, *fainteth not, neither is weary* *. And as worshipping no other deity than the Maker of all Things, was the great article that distinguished the religion of the Jews from the Pagan; and as the Sabbath was a principal instrument of preserving and exercising this worship, it is therefore said to be *a sign between God and them, throughout their generations* †. A second use of the Sabbath was, to be a memorial, in future times, of the happy exchange which they had just then made, of a state of servitude and labour for one of liberty and ease. *Remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence, through a mighty hand, and by a stretched out arm; therefore he commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day* ‡. And it hath been thought by some learned men, that the time of keeping it was then changed in such manner, as that the primitive and patriarchal Sabbath was restored, when afterwards that day, on which our Lord arose again, was appointed to be observed §. But without examining into this, I proceed to

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the

* Isa. xl. 28.

† Exod. xxxi. 13.

‡ Deut. v. 15.

§ Wollius, Aët. Er. 1745, p. 694. thinks, that the seventh day of the creation, being the first full day of Adam's life, it would be not only his Sabbath, but the first of his week; and that being afterwards turned to the worship of the sun, God gave the Jews the seventh day of the week instead of it, but that Christ restored it. But Vignoles saith the beginning of the year was not changed at the Exodus; and that the day of it was Thursday. Others think, that the sixth

day

the third motive assigned for the appointment of the Sabbath, which was mercy and humanity: *that thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thy handmaid stranger may be refreshed**. And because that perverse nation would otherwise have been likely both to explain away general rules to almost nothing, and indeed to slight all rules, therefore to the prohibition in the commandment, particular ones of such and such work were added, in other parts of the law †; and the whole was enforced by the penalty of death ‡: whereas, people of better dispositions might have been trusted farther, and punished less rigorously.

On this footing things remained till Christianity appeared; which being in itself a competent institution and rule of human duty, no precepts given to mankind before, under less perfect dispensations, continue any farther obligatory, than they are plainly confirmed by it, or in their own nature moral and unchangeable. This not only the reason of the thing shews, but St. Paul hath fully and repeatedly declared it §; and especially concerning the observation of the seventh day of the week (which was the Jewish Sabbath) by name, in the second chapter of his epistle to the Colossians; where having first laid it down, that *Christ had blotted out the hand-writing of the former ordinances*, he infers: *Let no man therefore judge you in meat or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days* ||; which words are comprehensive enough to repeal the patriarchal Sabbath day
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day of the patriarchal forgotten week, being that of the Jewish Exodus, was made their seventh and Sabbath; whence the patriarchal seventh would be their and our first.

* Exod. xxiii. 12.

† Of ploughing and harvest-work, Exod. xxxiv. 21. of kindling fires, Exod. xxxv. 3. Indeed this last seems almost in effect prohibited before the law, Exod. xvi. 23. Nor might they buy or sell, Neh. xiii. 16.

‡ Exod. xxxi. 14.

§ According to the Cambridge MS. of the Gospels, our Saviour hath declared it in this point before him. For at the end of Luke vi. 5. it hath these words, both in the Greek and Latin. "The same day, seeing a certain man working on the Sabbath, he said to him, Man, if thou knowest what thou doest, thou art blessed; but if thou knowest not, thou art cursed, and a transgressor of the law."

|| Col. ii. 14, 16. Concerning this text, see Mede. Disc. 15, p. 57.

as well as the Jewish (which, however, was doubtless chiefly intended), if indeed the former was different from that which Christians now observe. Again, the same apostle, blaming the Galatians for *desiring to be still under bondage to the weak and poor elements* of the old dispensation, saith: *Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years: I am afraid lest I have bestowed on you labour in vain**. This passage, in its full latitude (which there appears no necessity of restraining) implies, that all preceding appointments of this kind were, under Christianity, null and void.

Still, we read in the history of our Saviour's sufferings, that the women which had followed him, *returned after beholding his sepulchre, and rested the Sabbath day*; that is, the seventh day of the week, *according to the commandment*†. But this by no means proves, that resting on the Saturday was to continue as much a duty after his death as before; though doubtless it was a duty as yet with respect to them, and probably the rest of his disciples too, because the abolition of it was not as yet made known to them. Nor indeed would it have been allowable for them, if they had known it, to offend the Jews, at so critical a time, by a seeming transgression in so favourite an article. It must be owned also, that our blessed Redeemer directs his followers, when the approaching troubles of *Judea* should come on, to *pray that their flight from them might not be in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day*‡. But he did not mean, that it would be unlawful to fly on the latter more than in the former, but inconvenient only, which it certainly would; because the Jews, who had sought to kill him for doing miracles on that day, would assuredly, when his disciples travelled upon it, though for the preservation of their lives, afford them no accommodations, but impute, and, if they could, punish it as a crime. It must be owned, lastly, that the apostles frequented the synagogues on the Sabbath, that is, the Saturday; but only with a view of converting the Jews to Christianity, not at all of conforming themselves to Judaism, otherwise than by way of prudent condescension. From the same motive, and from a spirit of abundant piety, no small part of the primitive Christians also

continued

* Gal. iv. 9, 10, 11.

† Luke xxiii. 55, 56.

‡ Matth. xxiv. 20.

continued for some ages paying honour to the Jewish Sabbath ; yet declared expressly all the while, that they looked on the obligation of it as totally expired with the rest of the law ; on which account, though they held religious assemblies on that day, yet they worked on it too.

But though the positive and ceremonial part of the Mosaic law is abolished, yet the moral and natural precepts remain in full force. And the ten commandments being delivered in a manner so peculiar to themselves, and having such peculiar notice taken of them both in the Old Testament and the New, have been always deemed in the church of Christ a summary of moral duties. Accordingly, our church hath placed them as such, both in the catechism and communion service ; the latter of which directs us, after the recital of the fourth, as well as the rest, to say, *Lord have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.* But some will ask, If we are bound to keep it, why are we not bound to keep the day specified in it, the last of the week ? The answer is, that two things are to be considered : the general intention of the commandment, and the particular means by which it appoints that intention to be executed. So far as its general intention goes, which is to set apart from worldly business a competent portion of time for religious uses, it was ever discoverable by reason, and binding to all men. So far as it appoints this portion to be one day in seven, it was always binding, where it could be known ; and directs only to what the Christian church had constantly observed, and prays with much reason to observe it rightly. Now, many learned men have conceived it to direct nothing farther ; apprehending, that the obligation which the Jews were under to keep the day which they do, did not arise from the words of the fourth commandment (for that, they think, would be equally obeyed by keeping stately any one day of the seven), but proceeded, from God's determination made in the wilderness, which one day theirs should be, by causing a double quantity of manna to fall on the preceding, and none on that. If this be so, we observe the whole of the commandment as literally as they. But if it prescribes, not only some one day in each week, but particularly the last day, then the prayer, that God would *incline our hearts to keep it*, must be understood with this limitation,

mitation, so far as we are concerned in it ; that is, so far as it relates to one day in seven, not to the last day of the week ; which limitation the composers of the prayer must certainly have designed ; for it is notorious, that none of them thought Saturday was to be kept holy. And indeed the ten commandments have other things in them peculiar to the Jews as well as this. Such is the description, *that brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage ;* and the promise, *that thy days may be long in the land, which the Lord thy God giveth thee.* Now we are not concerned at all in the peculiarities, even of this part of the Mosaic dispensation ; but to speak in the words of one of our homilies *, *Whatever is found in the fourth commandment, appertaining to the law of nature, ought to be retained of Christians.* Now, the law of nature enjoins only a due and convenient proportion of time to be kept holy. And supposing that proportion to be one day of rest, after six of labour, in memory of the creation, we comply with it equally, whether we pitch on the first or the last day of the week for that rest.

But there is one great advantage in choosing the former, on which the Author of our salvation rested from the labours of his state of humiliation, after accomplishing the great work he had undertaken ; that thus we may very fitly join the thankful memorial of the new creation (for so is our redemption called in scripture †), with that of the old. Nor doth our observation of the day stand, by any means, on this propriety alone, but on such other plain and strong authorities, as I shall now proceed to set before you.

Every single evangelist begins his account of our Saviour's resurrection, with observing that it was *on the first day of the week.* Now, it had been perfectly needless for any one of them to have done this, and very unlikely that all of them should, had the day been intended for no particular use. But evidently it was ; and for what use appears immediately. For on that very same day we find the apostles assembled, and Jesus in the midst of them, instructing them with his own mouth ‡. The first day of the very next week we find them assembled

* Of the time and place of prayer.

† 2 Cor. v. 17. Eph. ii. 10. iv. 24.

‡ John xx. 19.

assembled again, and our Lord with them *. Six weeks after, at Pentecost, is recorded in the Acts, a third instance of *all* the apostles at least, being *with one accord*, on that day, *in one place*, where *they were filled with the Holy Ghost* †. Farther yet, the same book informs us, that *on the first day of the week*, when the disciples came together to break bread, to receive the holy sacrament, *Paul preached to them* ‡. And that great apostle himself directs the Corinthians, that, *on the first day of the week*, every one should lay by, according to his ability, something for the poor §; which example of piety succeeding ages imitated, by charitable contributions in their weekly assemblies. Now, if any person can possibly imagine, that this day was so frequently specified in this manner by mere accident, let him only reflect, that throughout the whole history of the first Christians in the New Testament, no other day is ever specified as any way peculiarly regarded by them.

But farther still, St. *John*, in the *Revelation*, calls it the Lord's day. *I was in the spirit on the Lord's day* ||. For that he means by that phrase what we do now, is clear from hence, that St. *Ignatius*, exhorting to the due observation of this day, within a few years after him, used it in that sense ¶; as did the whole body of subsequent fathers, councils, laws, and histories; and no one, so far as appears, ever used it in any other. This day then hath the same mark in St. *John* that the blessed sacrament hath in St. *Paul*, of being appropriated to the honour of our Saviour. The former is called the *Lord's day*, just as the latter is the *Lord's supper*. And accordingly the epistle of St. *Barnabas*, written perhaps before the *Revelation*, saith, *We observe with gladness the eighth day, on which Jesus rose from the dead* **; confessedly meaning by the eighth, the next after the seventh, in our common language the first. Nor is there a single instance, from the earliest times downwards for 1500 years, of any church or sect or believers whatever, that did not profess keeping it holy to him. For what St. *Paul* saith, that *one man esteemed one day above another, and another esteemed every day alike* ††, plainly relates to the keeping of the Jewish festivals, which

was

* John xx. 26.

† Acts ii. 1, 4.

‡ Acts xx. 7.

§ 1 Cor. xvi. 1, 2.

|| Rev. i. 10.

¶ Ign. ad Magnes. § 9-8.

** Ep. Barnab. § 15.

†† Rom. xiv. 5.

was greatly controverted at that time, not of this Christian festival, about which there was no controversy at all.

Now, such universal consent, without exception, amongst persons who differed so widely about multitudes of other matters, could not but proceed from some original injunction, either of our Lord or his apostles. No authority besides theirs was early or extensive enough to be a ground of the practice; and we cannot well think it was taken up without any authority, for this reason besides others, that if it had, some ancient council would undoubtedly have placed it on a surer foundation. But no council ever pretended to establish the observation of this day; which, far from lowering its obligation, heightens it very much, by shewing, that the rulers of the church all along knew it to have been established from the beginning by a superior power*; and therefore they contented themselves to enforce the regard due to it, and determine particular doubts concerning it, from time to time. The New Testament indeed doth not say that our Saviour appointed it: But St. *Luke* saith in the Acts, that after his resurrection he conversed with the apostles forty days, *speaking to them of things pertaining to the kingdom of God*†; that is, the gospel dispensation. And St. *Clement*, the Roman, whom St. *Paul* to the Philippians calls *his fellow-labourer, whose name is in the book of life*‡, saith further, *We ought to do all things in order, which the Lord hath commanded: to perform our offices and services according to the appointed seasons. And he hath commanded them to be done, not at random and disorderly, but at determinate seasons and times*§. Now, what seasons can he so probably mean, as the returns of that day, which bears our Lord's name, and which later fathers expressly affirm was kept by his command||? But without any such evidence; as in the case of the patriarchs before Moses, and of the Jews for many ages after him, though we

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read

* Quod universa tenet ecclesia, nec conciliis institutum, sed semper retentum est, non nisi auctoritate apostolica traditum rectissime creditur, Aug. de Bapt. contra Donatistas, l. 4. c. 23.

† Acts i. 3.

‡ Phil. iv. 3.

§ Clem. Rom. Ep. i. § 40.

|| Euseb. de Laud. Const. p. 733. Ed. Reading. Epiphan. Hom. de Resur. vol. 2. p. 277. saith, Christ blessed and sanctified the day of his resurrection, referring to God's blessing the Sabbath. Aust. de Civ. Dei, l. 22. c. 30. Ep. 119. c. 13, Athan. de Sabbato.

read nothing in scripture of the *observance* of the *Sabbath*, yet we presume it from the institution; so here, in the case of the first Christians, though we read nothing in scripture of the *institution* of the *Lord's day*, we may presume it from the observance; just as we do in the common law of our own country; in which multitudes of things are proved to be obligatory, not by producing the original appointment of them, for it is not extant, but by shewing such an immemorial usage, as must have proceeded from an appointment formerly made by the sovereign power.

Or supposing that it was not our Saviour in person, but the apostles, who instituted the Lord's day (as indeed those Christian writers, which have spoken of it in the lowest terms, have acknowledged, that it began to be observed, not only with their approbation, but by their authority*), this will come very nearly to the same thing. For the apostles were such as could say, *It hath seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us* †. Nor could they design it for a temporary institution, since the reasons of it are so evidently perpetual. But even suppose it had been only taken up with the joint consent of the Christian church, yet St. Paul would have thought it a sufficient answer to all, who should have pleaded for treating it with disrespect, that if *any man be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God* ‡. Suppose it had been only enjoined by the *governors* of the church; yet the direction of scripture is, *Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls* §. Suppose our *temporal* governors had required us to reverence it, as they have most strictly, here again the direction of scripture is, *Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers, not only for wrath, but for conscience sake; for they are God's ministers* ||. And as we confess ourselves bound by their command to keep occasional fasts and thanksgivings, on account of our worldly concerns, why not a stated thanksgiving for blessings infinitely superior? But even were the observation of the day to stand solely on the footing of its own reasonableness and propriety, yet this is the proportion of time
which

* Heylin, p. 32.

† Acts xv. 28. ‡ 1 Cor. xi. 16. § Heb. xiii. 17. || Rom. xiii. 1, 5, 6.

which the wisdom of God fixed on for his servants under the Old Testament: and since we owe him much more than they did, why should we pay him less of any token of pious gratitude? If the Sabbath was *a sign between God and them**, so is the Lord's day a very expressive one between Christ and us: and why should we not declare, by this mark among the rest, whose we are? Nay, lastly, were it grounded merely on its usefulness to mankind, still, a writer, who was never suspected of prejudice in favour of religion, Mr. *Hobbes*, acknowledges, that though the common opinion of Christians concerning this day were an error, yet it would be a happy one, and the contrary one ought not to be published†. And another author since, of the same stamp, hath confessed it to be the most useful of the seven‡; as indeed I hope hereafter to shew you it is, by much better proofs than such testimonies. If then any one of these reasons for keeping it ought singly to be of such weight, only think how forcible the influence of them all united should be; how complicated the guilt of disregarding them all is, and how dreadful an opening it must give to the disregard of every tie that we can be under! Think, I say, of these things, and you will see abundant cause, both from religious and worldly considerations, to hold it in honour, and apply to it the Psalmist's words, which some have apprehended were spoken with a prophetic view to its future institution: *This is the day, which the Lord hath made: we will rejoice and be glad in it*§.

* Exod. xxxi. 13, 17.

† Hobbes against Bramhal, in Moter on the Lord's day, p. 238.

‡ Mandeville, Essay on Charity Schools, towards the end.

§ Ps. cxviii. 24.

S E R M O N CXIII.

ON THE PROPER OBSERVANCE OF THE SABBATH.

GEN. ii. 3.

And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because that in it he had rested from all his work, which God created and made.

IN my former discourse I shewed you on what authority the appropriation of one day in seven to the purposes of religion stands. Let us now therefore proceed to consider,

II. In what manner that day ought to be spent. And,

I. A due portion of it ought to be employed in public attendance on the worship of God and religious instruction.

This, it must be owned, is not explicitly mentioned, either in the text or in the fourth commandment, but only comprehended under the general phrase of *sanctifying* or hallowing the Sabbath, whereas the point of rest is particulatly specified. And, without question, abstaining from labour, in memory of God's completing the creation of the heavens and earth (which some of the Heathen held to proceed from blind fate or chance, whilst others worshipped the principal parts of them as deities), was of itself, without any thing more, *sanctifying*, that is, devoutly distinguishing the day, by a practical declaration upon it of the fundamental article of true religion, that an infinitely wise, and just, and good Being, is the Maker and Lord of all things. And enjoining the Jews afterwards, on the same day, to commemorate their miraculous deliverance from Egyptian bondage, and allow refreshment, during the whole of it, not only to their servants, but their cattle, must greatly promote amongst them both thankful piety and tenderness of heart. But still, we cannot well imagine,

gine, that they were left at liberty to throw away all this leisure just as they pleased, when the very reason of appointing it led them so naturally to employ it well; and when, if they did not, many of them would of course employ it very ill.

Besides, the law of *Moses* directed, that the seventh day should be a *holy convocation* or assembly, as well as the Sabbath of rest*: and allotted to the priests and Levites 48 cities in different parts of the land†; from whence they might, with more convenience, go to perform religious offices in every quarter; particularly that of instructing the people, which *Moses* expressly assigns to their whole tribe: *They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law*‡. Accordingly, *Philo* § and *Josephus* ||, who both lived in the same age with our Saviour, say, their lawgiver appointed his law to be read and expounded, in public assemblies, for the improvement of the hearers, every seventh day, which is very consistent with the more solemn reading of it, appointed by him every seventh year, at the general meeting of the whole people¶. And *St. James* also saith, *Moses of old time hath, in every city, them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath day*** . Still, it must be confessed, that this practice is no where in the Old Testament expressly either prescribed, or said to be observed; and therefore we may doubt, whether it became constant and universal very early. However, we find there, that good persons usually resorted to the prophets (doubtless for instruction) on the Sabbath day††. We find a complaint, that the enemies of the Jews had burnt up all the synagogues of God in the land‡‡; which,

by

* Lev. xxiii. Comp. Numb. x. 2. Isa. iv. 5.

† Numb. xxxv. 1—8. Josh. xxi. 1—8. ‡ Deut. xxxiii. 10.

§ De Septenario, p. 282. See also de Vit. Mos. l. 3. p. 167. where he saith the Jews were to spend the Sabbath εν ιλαριναις ευθυμiais.—χολαζοντας ως υιοι, γελωσιν, η παιδιαις, η μιμων, η αρχησων επιδειξεισι,—αλλα μονω τω φιλοσοφειν—Τα γαρ κατα πολεις προσευκτηρια τι ετερον εστιν, η διδασκαλεια φρονησεως και σωφροσυνης και δικαιοσυνης, ευσεβειας τε και οσιωτης και συμπαστης αρετης. See also de Dec. Orac. p. 197, et de Mundi Opificio, p. 30. et Lib. Quis Rerum, &c. p. 49. Τεταρτος δε περι της αιι παρθενς και αμνητορας εβδομαδος, ινον των απραξιαν αυτης μελετασα γενησις, εις μνημην τε αορατως παντα δρωντες ερχηται.

|| Contr. Ap. l. 2. § 17.

¶ Deut. xxxi. 10, 13. ** Acts xvi. 21. †† 2 Kings iv. 23. ‡‡ Ps. lxxiv. 8.

by this expression, must have been pretty numerous. We find a promise, that *upon every dwelling-place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, there shall be a glory and a defence* *. We find the Levites mentioned, more than once, as those who *taught the good knowledge of the Lord to all Israel* †. When they had been *for a long season without a teaching priest, and without the law*, it is represented as a dreadful instance of national misery ‡. And when better times are foretold in another book, part of the description is, that *from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh should come to worship before God* §.

On the return from the captivity, this prediction was verified. And so good were the effects of the stated public worship and teaching, which thenceforward obtained more generally than before, that even had it first begun then, it had deserved to continue through all future ages. For idolatry, which nothing had hitherto been able to overcome, was entirely abolished by it: the nation grew more virtuous, as well as pious; and enjoyed more tranquillity than in any preceding time. Sojourners in *Judea*, and inhabitants of other countries, into which they were dispersed, attending their synagogues, as we find in the New Testament they did, partook of a blessing, which the wisest of their lawgivers and philosophers had not provided for them; and multitudes of the Heathen were converted to the one true God. Indeed, about the time of our Saviour's appearance (as every thing good is apt to degenerate amongst men), this excellent institution was become an instrument of some superstition and uncharitableness, as well as much good. But that only increased the necessity of using it under due regulations; that it might cure, by its proper influence, those evils which it had caused by accidental abuse. And therefore he first reformed it; then by his apostles established it throughout the world, and provided for its being carried on to all ages; and ever since, the principal season for instructing mankind hath been this day.

On this day, from the very birth of Christianity, as we read in the Acts, *the disciples came together to break bread* ||; that

* If. iv. 5.

† 2 Chr. xxx. 22. xxxv. 3.

‡ 2 Chr. xv. 3.

§ If. lxvi. 23.

|| Acts xx. 7.

that is, to receive the Lord's supper. With their breaking of bread, we read also, they joined *the apostle's doctrine and prayer* *. Nor was this an act of mere voluntary piety, but a duty strictly binding. For they were commanded *not to forsake the assembling themselves together* †, when the utmost dangers attended the practice. For the service of these assemblies peculiarly the Christian ministry was instituted; in these the Christian sacraments were celebrated; good Christians were to be admitted into them, bad ones excluded from them. Indeed, the whole New Testament considers the followers of Christ, not as single unconnected believers, but as churches or societies, meeting together for the honour of God, and their mutual edification. And this they did so constantly, even in the days of the bitterest persecution, that *Pliny*, a Heathen magistrate, writing, within a few years after the death of *St. John*, to the emperor *Trajan*, for directions how to proceed in punishing them, describes them by their custom of holding congregations on a stated day to worship Christ, and bind themselves by a sacrament, or oath, to commit no wickedness ‡. Again, about 40 years after him, *Justin Martyr*, in a defence of them, when persecuted by another Heathen emperor, gives the following account of their observation of Sunday. For though that name is undoubtedly superstitious in its origin, as Monday and all the rest are, yet the early Christians used it without scruple §, both because they were not understood by it to have a superstitious meaning, and because they could allege a better ground for it than the idolaters (which accordingly some ancient fathers did ||), that then Christ, *the Sun of Righteousness*, rose ¶ from the grave, and shone forth with new lustre. *On the day called Sunday*, therefore, saith *Justin*, *all of us, whether we live in the city or the country, meet in one place: where the writings of the apostles and prophets are read; an exhortation to live suitably to them is made by the president of the assembly; and we offer up our joint prayers. Then bread and wine is brought: and after repeated prayers and praises by the president, to which*
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* Acts ii. 42.

† Heb. x. 25.

‡ Plin. lib. x. Ep. 97.

§ Tert. Apol. c. 16.

|| Hieron. in Ps. cxviii. 24. Ambros. Serm. 60. tom. v. p. 81. Ed. Par.

¶ Mal. iv. 2.

the people answer, Amen, it is distributed throughout the congregation: and alms are collected, and left in the president's hands, for the use of the poor. After which he adds, The reason why we all meet on Sunday, is, that this is the first day in which God created the world, and on which our Saviour Jesus Christ rose from the dead.*

Such was the obedience of the first Christians to the rules of the gospel, though the laws of men punished it with death; whereas we, who call ourselves Christians too, and live in a time when God and man require the same thing, disobey both. And the consequence hath been, that whereas their zeal filled them with all piety and virtue, and converted the world to true religion, our lukewarmness hath made us negligent and bad in the whole of our conduct, and we are relapsing into the profligacy and atheism of the Pagans. For how indeed is it possible, that men should know their duty without being instructed, or regard it without being admonished? And what other sufficient instruction or admonition will the generality of those have, who despise that which the word of God hath established for them? The church is the universal school, opened on this day by the divine command, for teaching all men reverence to their Maker, love to their fellow-creatures, moral government of themselves, right, and worthy, and exemplary behaviour in every part of public and private life. We appeal to your consciences, whether these things are not faithfully taught here; and, if they be, whether it is not of the last importance, that the teaching of them be constantly frequented?

Many pleas and excuses are made on this head; but none will avail for the voluntary omission of what God hath appointed. Think then with your own hearts: Hath he not appointed public prayers and preaching? And, if he hath, why are not you, to attend them? Some who do, perhaps you will say, are not the better for it. But how can you know that? They might be still worse without it. Or, supposing they are not better, if others are (as undoubtedly multitudes are), why may not you hope to be so too? They who fail of it, fail through their own faults. Do you avoid those

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faults,

* Apol. I. § 67.

faults; and you may justly promise yourself much good from what, on many accounts, is so likely to *do* good. Perhaps you do not see this great likelihood. But is it not want of thinking, or of thinking fairly, that hinders you from seeing what to others is most evident? Or though you were incapable of seeing it, which is wiser, you or your Lord and Master?

Possibly however you admit, that preaching may be of service to the ignorant part of mankind, but apprehend it can inform you of nothing needful, which you do not already know. But are you indeed, after considering the point with impartiality and humility, quite sure of this? Or if you were, can you be reminded of nothing you did not think of? excited to nothing you did not practise? confirmed in nothing you do practise? receive no benefit of any kind? Why, yes: there are preachers, from whom, now and then, some degree of rational entertainment may be expected: and such, when occasion offers, you are willing to hear. But is there any preacher, from whom you can fail to hear things of the greatest moment to your present and eternal happiness; which, by laying hold of you just at that moment, may be the means of your escaping misery in both worlds? And is not this your main concern, in comparison of which, not only entertainment, but information in other matters, is a mere trifle? Besides, is hearing the preacher the chief inducement that should bring you hither? Far from it. It is hearing the word of God in the lessons: it is paying adoration to God in the prayers and psalms and hymns. If you attend not to these, you will partake of little real benefit from the sermon; and if you attend as you ought to these, you will never go back without improvement, though there be no sermon at all; and you may improve very much by the meanest that is delivered. For that depends, not on human performance, but on the divine blessing. What doth the great Apostle himself say of his own preaching, and that of his companions? *Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted; Apollos watered: but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing; neither he that watereth; but God that*

giveth the increase *. Therefore wait on God for it constantly, in the ordinances which he hath instituted; for you know not by whom he will send it, perhaps by the weakest instrument he hath; *that, as the same apostle speaks, the excellency of the power may be of him, and not of us* †. Our blessed Lord assures all his disciples, that *where two or three are gathered together in his name, there is he in the midst of them* ‡. And if he be there, it matters little who else is not.

Still probably some of you will ask, Why should the blessing of God peculiarly follow public prayers and sermons, when you can make use of the same, or better, at home? But if you can, is it true that you do: and that you do it steadily? If not, this is only a poor attempt to deceive others and yourselves. But supposing you do, may not God with justice try your obedience, by directing in what method you shall apply for his favours? And may he not, with great wisdom, direct to this method? Unless mankind be taught to worship and obey the Sovereign Lord of all, they must be wicked and miserable. The generality cannot sufficiently learn in private to do this, and most of the remainder will not. Without some farther care, the lower sort will be absolute barbarians; and the upper, much worse than they now are. Therefore God requires all to assemble for instruction. Were he to make exceptions, every one, that pleased, would imagine or pretend himself to be excepted. Therefore he prescribes it even to those, who may seem to need it least; but who in truth need his grace, as much as any. If they will condescend to set a good example in this respect to others, they shall be rewarded for it by spiritual benefits conferred on themselves. If they will not, the haughtiness of their fancied wisdom shall be punished by withdrawing the divine influences from them. And what is there, in this procedure, unworthy of God, who *resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble* §?

But here some of the upper part of the world will reply, that they acknowledge the necessity of setting a good example;

* 1 Cor. iii. 5, 6, 7.

† Matth. xviii. 20.

‡ 2 Cor. iv. 7.

§ James iv. 6. 1 Pet. v. 5.

ple; and therefore, amongst their neighbours and dependents in the country, they do go to church on Sunday. But is it there only that example is necessary? Or is it not, if possible, more necessary in this wicked town than any where else? Doth not your family here, see your neglect of your duty to God, and learn from thence to neglect their duty, both to him and you. Do not your neighbours and dependents in the country hear of your behaviour when absent from them? And will they not naturally conclude, that if you worship your Maker only at some times and places, it is from no principle of conscience that you worship him at any?

But others will probably allege, that they would be much more regular and constant than they are, if it were not for frequent hindrances, which intervene and prevent them. But do you not often throw these hindrances in your own way? At least, could you not easily, if you would, remove them out of your way? Business perhaps, that might be let alone, is done: or what might, with a little forecast, be well enough dispatched at other times, is reserved for Sunday; or what might be finished before church time, is delayed till then; or what one person might manage, keeps several at home. And do you think this fitting, and will it be thought so at the last day, that every thing else should be preferred before the most weighty of all things? That you should make excuses for not serving your Creator, which you would be ashamed to make in any other case, and can hardly make in this with a serious countenance! *Be not deceived: God is not mocked* *.

Some however will urge, that care of their health at least is a serious plea: and that, during the Winter season, they cannot attend public worship, without hazard of it. Now unquestionably, where this is really so, *God will have mercy and not sacrifice* †. But do not these same people venture to expose their healths on any day of the week besides, perhaps on some part of this very day, to much greater hazards in places to which they have much less call? And why then will they attempt in vain to blind others and themselves with this pretence?

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* Gal. vi. 7.

† Matth. ix. 13. xii. 7.

But a still farther allegation is, that, could they come to church ever so safely, they cannot possibly : they have no accommodations there. Would God all, who have, would constantly use them ! But were they who allege that they have not, to speak their hearts, are they glad to make this excuse, or are they sorry ? If the former, it is not a sincere one ; if the latter, I heartily wish, that, where they are wanting, more places of worship were built. Some of these persons could do a great deal towards this ; and probably they spend their money by no means so well. But, at present, there is room for the poor without any expence, for the rich at very little expence, even in this town, at one time or another of the day, either at their own church, or some church or chapel very near them.

But the hours of church are inconvenient. And whose fault is it, that they are become so ? We have not made them earlier ; but these complainers have made theirs absurdly later. Why will they not, on this day at least, alter them back to what they were formerly ? Do they not often bear with the inconvenience of as great or greater changes on very slight occasions ? Why then must a change be thought impracticable or insupportable, in order to attend upon God and his word ? Reflect a little, how very low your esteem of him must be, if you think this too much to submit to on his account. Indeed they, who do attend public worship on the former part of the day, should remember that it is equally appointed, equally useful on the latter also ; and should dispose their family-affairs in such a manner, as to be present (so many of them as can,) at each : applying to their devotions that rule, which the wise man lays down concerning their charity : *In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand. For thou knowest not, whether shall prosper, either this or that : or whether they both shall be alike good* *.

And as all ranks of men are jointly concerned in the duty of frequenting divine offices : all should allow their servants, and those with whom they have concerns, leisure for it. If they desire leisure for this purpose, refusing it is most shocking cruelty : and not contriving for it, is criminal in the next degree.

* Eccl. xi. 6.

degree. But even though they do not desire it, exhorting, disposing, pressing them to it, nay insisting upon it, so far as we have authority, is matter both of conscience and prudence.

But now, from the public exercises of religion, I proceed,

2. To the private ones requisite on the Lord's day.

If, before we come to the congregation, we think of nothing serious ; or as soon as we leave it, lay aside out of our minds every thing that we have said, and heard, and felt there ; we must expect to be little the better for our attendance. And a principal cause, why men are commonly so very little the better, is the latter of these two great faults. Our Saviour himself hath told us, *When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and considereth it not, (for so we should translate) then cometh the wicked one ; and immediately catcheth away that, which was sown in his heart. This is he, that receiveth seed by the way-side**. Since therefore hearing God's word is a duty of the day, that preparation for it beforehand, and reflexion upon it afterwards, which are necessary to give it root within us, must be so. And let us ask our consciences, do we practise both ? Do we consider on the morning of the Lord's day, for what excellent ends it was distinguished from others ; how carefully we ought to *keep our feet*, as the wise man expresses it, *when we go to the house of God†* ; and what a sin we shall be guilty of, and what a loss we shall suffer, if we regard only outward form, and neglect inward improvement ? Do we again, after church, take the first convenient opportunity for retiring into ourselves : for thinking impartially, what is the proper use to make of all that hath been delivered to us ; for determining, that we will make it, without loss of time, and for intreating the assistance of heaven, that we may : or are we glad to get rid of such unwelcome ideas, by any method, the first moment that we are able ? And if our behaviour hath been blameable in this respect hitherto, shall it be better for the future ? And will we give, as the apostle directs, *more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest we let them slip ‡* ?

But,

* Matth. xiii. 19. Mark iv. 15. † Eccl. v. 1. ‡ Heb. ii. 1.

But, besides the particular subjects that have happened to be laid before us at church, we have need to consider frequently at home the general state of our hearts and lives, and what we have to hope or fear from it, here and hereafter. Such inquiries may indeed be made on other days; and the oftener the better. But is it likely they will, if they are omitted on that day, which is peculiarly proper for them, and on which we are continually reminded of them? Some have little time else for any deliberate self-examination: none can have a fitter time: why then should any one throw it away? Is there nothing you have need to learn or amend? Perhaps there is so much, that you are afraid to set about thinking of it. If so, your only way is to set about it instantly. Every other remedy will increase the disease: this alone will remove it. But perhaps you cannot think to good purpose long together. Do then to good purpose what you can: bring yourself gradually to more: use pious books for your assistance. Perhaps they seem flat, and void of entertainment: but perhaps also it is your fault that they do. Or if that were otherwise, is it not sufficient that by them you are instructed, exhorted, warned, reproved, when you want it? There is no pleasure in this. But did you never persist in applying to any thing, which at first gave you no pleasure? And should it not be the greatest pleasure to conquer your sins, to advance in goodness? Possibly in some of these books, you meet with expressions now and then, which appear unelegant and singular: and they excite ludicrous ideas in your minds instead of serious ones. But possibly too, this may proceed entirely from your own ignorance, or wrong disposition. For the authors of many of them were men of both as good understanding, and as good breeding as any, either in their own times or the present. Or suppose the defect to be theirs; yet surely, in other cases, you never slight useful information or direction, because it is accompanied by a few peculiarities, and why should you in this?

But it may be your hindrance is of a different kind. You are afraid, that employing regularly part of your Sunday's leisure thus, will expose you to ridicule, as formal superstitious wretches. And have you no fear on the other side then, that employing it idly will expose you to censure, as irreligi-

ous and profane wretches? Besides, there is no occasion for all persons to know how your time is spent. Or if they did, are you to make the opinion, or perhaps only the pretended opinion, of every inconsiderate creature, the rule of your life? Think how far that would carry you. And if what they are pleased to call superstition, or preciseness, will lead you to every thing right and good, and the neglect of it will lead to the contrary, be not ashamed of it for a few reproachful names; but secure to your private use, without aiming to be remarkable in doing it, a share of the Lord's day, proportioned to what your case requires, and your circumstances admit: improve your minds in religious knowledge by reading; improve your hearts in religious affections by meditation and prayer; guard your steps by firm but prudent resolutions; and let neither imaginary nor small impediments keep you from this. At least make it an usual practice; but if possible a constant one. For the oftener you omit it, the stronger temptation you will be under to lay it aside: and the more steadily you perform it, the surer you will be of receiving, not only much benefit, but, after a while, much comfort from it.

Till you take the proper care of your own behaviour on the Lord's day, it must be with an ill grace, and with small success, that you can attempt to regulate that of persons belonging to you, though it concerns you very much on more accounts than a few. And therefore you ought to be religious, for this reason amongst weightier, to make them so. But to be so yourself and neglect them is wonderfully inconsistent. And yet many, whose sincerity in religion one dares not question, suffer their servants, if not their children, to live without any regard to it, or any knowledge of it, as if they were totally indifferent, both about their future happiness, and their own present interest. Very often they have not the shadow of an excuse to make for this inattention. Sometimes business is pleaded. But on Sundays at least, there must or should be leisure; and it is both unwise and wicked to spend it in trifling or indolence, to the omission of so important a care; which consequently is one of the private duties of the day. Here the injunction of God to the Jews, which cannot be less in force among Christians, *The words*

which I command thee shall be in thine heart : and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children ; and thou shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up *. This doth not mean, that our conversation should be of nothing besides religion ; but it must mean, that religion should have a due share in it ; and doubtless then a peculiar share on the day, which God hath hallowed. Employing a part of that in giving those about you the obvious proofs of Christianity, just notions of the holiness of the divine law, and their need of a Redeemer and a Sanctifier, instruction in their various duties to God and man and themselves, joyful expectations of the rewards of piety, awful apprehensions of the consequences of sin, affectionate cautions against the dangers to which they are exposed, will be a most improving exercise to yourselves, and afford you the most rational prospect of gaining an useful influence over them to your own comfort, and to their good in this life and the next. Your children are part of yourselves : All who depend on you, are placed under your inspection. You complain perhaps of both. Why then will you not use the opportunity of this day to remedy what you complain of ? In all likelihood they will be much the worse for the day, unless you endeavour to make them the better. You cannot indeed be sure of prevailing with them. But if you do your best in a prudent manner, and engage others to do what you cannot so properly do in person, you will not fail of being able to say in general, *As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord* †. They, who have never been vicious, may usually with ease be made religious, by good advice and good books, a regular example set them, and a good-natured watchfulness over them. The very worst may be either restrained or removed ; perhaps may be reformed. And how excellent an use of the day this would be, I shall leave upon your thoughts in the words of scripture : *He which converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins* ‡.

* Deut. vi. 6, 7.

† Josh. xxiv. 15.

‡ James v. 20.

S E R M O N CXIV.

ON THE PROPER OBSERVANCE OF THE SABBATH.

GEN. ii. 3.

And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because that in it he rested from all his work, which God created and made.

HAVING proposed from these words to shew,

I. On what authority the appropriation of one day in seven to the purposes of religion stands;

II. In what manner that day ought to be spent :

I have, in two discourses, finished the former of these heads, and made some entrance on the latter; under which I have considered our obligations,

1. To attend public worship and instruction on this day :
2. To spend a due portion of it in the more private exercises of piety. And now I proceed to another duty; which is,
3. To rest from labour.

This is not so strictly required of Christians on the Lord's day, as it was of Jews on the sabbath; to whom not only the fourth commandment prohibited work in general terms, but further and more particular prohibitions were given, and the whole most severely enforced, in other parts of their law, as I have already observed to you. Nor would milder injunctions have suited the nature of the people; which required them to be treated, as St. Paul takes notice, like children under age, or bond-servants*; to whom rules are always prescribed more minutely, and a more punctual observance of them is expected, and harsher punishments are inflicted, than

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* Gal. iv. 1—11.

after they are grown up to years of greater discretion, and more capable of being trusted to themselves. Indeed the most rigorous precautions proved insufficient to make that wayward nation regard, long together, almost any part of their religion, before the captivity, and to enforce the observance of the Sabbath even after it*. But as profaneness and superstition very naturally prepare the way for each other; so when at length they had recovered from the former, they fell into the latter; and some would not so much as defend their lives on this day†, others would not cure a disease‡, others would condemn the slightest common action, under the notion of its being work; as when the disciples rubbed a few ears of corn in their hands to eat§; which the Jews at this day insist was a transgression of the law. Nay, they are gone farther than their predecessors in our Saviour's time; for now they will not pull one of their cattle out of a pit on the Sabbath, which then they would||. *Jesus*, the great restorer of rational piety, gave them the most convincing proofs, that they were never bound to abstain from such things¶. Indeed, besides his other arguments, which you may read in the gospels, a single rule, alleged by him on more occasions than one, that *God will have mercy, and not sacrifice*, afforded the most satisfactory direction to every considerate mind. For if he preferred the exercise of needful humanity and goodness before the most sacred institutions of his own worship (so that the latter might be omitted, if else an opportunity of the former would be lost), undoubtedly he would also choose mercy, rather than mere rest from labour, an appointment of plainly inferior rank. As for small and inconsiderable actions, they come not properly under the denomination of work; and, unless forbidden by name, were always to be deemed objects beneath the attention of the law. Nor are we Christians bound to the same rigour of external observances which the Jews were. For the world being arrived at a proper maturity for it, our blessed Redeemer hath delivered all the children

* Neh. xiii. 15—22. † 1 Macc. ii. 31—41. ‡ Matth. xii. 9—14. Mark iii. 1—6. Luke vi. 6—11. xiii. 10—17. xiv. 1—6.

§ Matth. xii. 1—8. Mark ii. 23—28. Luke vi. 1—5.

|| Matth. xii. 11. Luke xiv. 5. Nizz. vet. in Wagenfeil, p. 207, 208.

¶ See the Texts, d, e.

dren of God from that subjection to these elements, which their former state of infancy required, and placed them under the milder discipline of a more ingenuous and manly obedience. Not the letter therefore, but the spirit and equity of the precept obliges us; only we must remember, that to abuse this gracious indulgence, would be ingratitude superadded to profaneness; and that our concern is, neither stupidly to *entangle* ourselves again *with the yoke of bondage*, when *Christ hath made us free* *, nor wickedly *use our liberty for an occasion to the flesh* †, or a *cloak of maliciousness* ‡.

To preserve this medium hath been the endeavour of his church, by prudently accommodating its practice to the varying circumstances of successive ages. Whilst the powers of this world were Heathen, and many believers were servants for life to unbelieving masters, we do not find that they refused to work, when commanded, on the Lord's day; well weighing, we may be sure, how much that would hurt the cause of Christianity; and that abstaining from labour on the day, was neither so important in itself, as meeting for worship, nor founded on such evident authority of Christ and his apostles, who probably were less explicit in the matter; because an injunction of that kind would both have exposed the primitive converts to much ill treatment, and the gospel itself to much calumny and suspicion. But as soon as ever the civil power was in the hands of Christians, they shewed their regard to the day, in this respect as well as others §: and though they did not call it the Sabbath, or day of rest, for many hundreds of years ||, yet they made it such immediately; only with some exceptions in particular points, which the nature of things, or the exigency of the times, appeared to demand. Concerning these, the following ages differed from each other, both in practice and judgment; commonly inclining to negligence, yet sometimes also to superstition. But they fell universally into one very great imprudence, of appointing a large number of holidays besides the Lord's day; which degraded that, and obstructed needful industry. But amongst us, this evil was redressed at the reformation,

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and

* Gal. v. 1.

† Gal. v. 13.

‡ 1 Pet. ii. 16.

§ Cod. l. 3. tit. 12. leg. 3.

|| Heylin, part 2. p. 60, &c. saith, not till 1000.

and matters were once again established on a right footing; till a spirit of excessive strictness arose, and led some to assert the necessity of as scrupulous, and as gloomy a rest, on our weekly festival, as ever the Jews had observed on theirs. Just apprehensions of danger from hence unaccountably hurried several both learned and devout men into the opposite extreme, without seeing it, and without suspecting (however strange it may appear to us now), that any harm was to be feared on that side *. Grievous animosities accompanied the dispute, which contributed not a little to the general confusion that happened soon after. Since the restoration, opinions have become gradually more reasonable; but practice hath grown so very loose, notwithstanding repeated laws for the regulation of it, that few need be told what is permitted on this day; but multitudes want much to be reminded of what is required and forbidden.

Now, so much rest is evidently required, as will suffice for the exercises of religion, public and private, and the purposes of mercy to ourselves, our servants and our cattle, for which the day was appointed. And whoever considers how many and important these are, and that there must be one rule fixed for all persons to go by, cannot fail to see, that no other will answer the end, than that of excluding worldly cares and employments, as much as possible, from morning to night. When we have removed ourselves, as far as we can, from common business, it is mighty apt to intrude upon our thoughts, and drive out better things. But how much more would it do so, were we always to come immediately from it hither, and return immediately to it again?

Still, such works as are necessary for the support of life, or restoring sick persons to health, or preserving others from attacks of great disorders to which they are liable, may and must be done upon the Lord's day; only the doers of them should be peculiarly careful to spend some of the remainder of it in acts of piety, which they too often sadly neglect.

If labour of any other sort could be ordinarily permitted on this day, it must be that of cultivating the earth, and gathering

* Heylin saith, in the dedication of his first part to the King, that "in such a church as this, there was no fear that ever the Lord's day would have been overrun by the profane neglect of any pious duty on that day required."

thering in the fruits of it : the proper season for which, especially for the latter, may otherwise be lost. And accordingly allowances of that kind have been formerly granted by law *. But they have been found so little needful, and so liable to abuse, that these laws have been repealed, and that of *Moses* resumed ; *six days shalt thou work : but on the seventh, in earing, that is, in ploughing time, and in harvest, thou shalt rest* †. Never, I believe, hath any general scarcity, seldom, if ever, any great distress, in any particular place, happened, merely by observing this rule. But were the breach of it indulged, whenever the persons concerned should think it necessary, many of them would plead the necessity every year, and in a little while throughout the year : so their servants and cattle would be kept to incessant toil ; and just that part of the world which most needs instructing and civilizing, that is, the lowest, would have by far the least opportunity for it.

And if working is not to be allowed on the plea of necessity in their case, much less can it in others, where the urgency is not so great. There is no occupation, in which the labour of six days will not maintain a diligent and frugal man for the seventh, unless he wants health and strength, or is burdened with a helpless family ; and these things entitle him to public relief. So that every one may have leisure, on this day, for serving his Maker, for improving himself in his duty, for teaching those who belong to him theirs, for enjoying also a comfortable share of ease and refreshment. And if any one, from sordid attachment to his own interest and profit, is unwilling to take leisure for these purposes, he little understands what his real interest consists in ; and should not be suffered, either to keep such as are under him from spending this portion of their lives better, or to make advantages to himself by labour, when others, for such good reasons, abstain from it.

The laws of our country, therefore, are both just and wise, in prohibiting, not only work, but (with proper exceptions) buying and selling on the Lord's day. For they fill up the
time

* Constantine first made a law for this purpose. Cod. lib. 3. tit. 12. leg. 3.

† Exod. xxxiv. 21.

time and thoughts, and detain men from the exercises of religion, as effectually as more fatiguing employments: nor will it be at all difficult, with a little contrivance, to avoid them. And it is both irreligious to do these things needlessly, and cruel also to force others, either to violate their consciences, by exercising their callings when they ought not, or to lose their business, by refusing to transgress their duty. But if private persons will not attend to such considerations, public magistrates, as guardians of the laws, should carefully support the innocent, by punishing the guilty.

Besides these ways of breaking the holy rest of this day, another is, needlessly travelling upon it. If people take journeys then about their common business, it is as directly following their trade, as keeping open shop. If the journey be the only business, it is trespassing on the quiet, probably too on the worship of the day, in the face of all the world. And this is often done so absolutely, without any colour of sufficient reason, that it must be mere affectation; surely not a proper behaviour towards our Maker, nor a reputable one amongst our fellow-creatures. Possibly some of the great originally took it up as a distinction: but whoever will, may very easily distinguish himself in the same manner. Indeed too many, both of middle and even low condition, have already learnt to do so: go out early on parties of diversion and amusement, from which they return late; throw away the most sacred portion of their time, and not a little of their money, on follies, if not vices, of which they thus acquire a destructive relish; leave their families, if they have any, exposed to all manner of temptations; and set both them and their acquaintance an example of disregard to duty, and of madness for pleasure, too likely to ruin them in this life and the next.

But without worldly business, and without stirring far from their own houses, men frequently contrive to give themselves but little rest, and their servants yet less: partly by unnecessary entertainments and company at home, partly by a multitude of unnecessary visits abroad; which between them so employ several of the family, if not the whole, that scarce any day of the week is so void of leisure. Now, suppose these occupations were ever so far from being laborious, yet
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it is by no means fitting, that hours allotted to piety and recollection should be consumed and swallowed up in a hurry of trifles. We ought to allow seasons of quiet to our minds, as well as our bodies, that they may cool into serious thoughtfulness; and when shall that be, if not on this day? We ought likewise to afford every one under us due opportunities for learning, considering, resolving, praying; and *give them*, in this respect, no less than others, *what is just and equal; knowing that we also have a Master in heaven**. If they desire it, a refusal is gross inhumanity. If they desire it not, they need it but the more. And, instead of pleading, that, if they had vacant time, they would use it ill, the right way is, to provide it for them, and endeavour that they may use it well. Thus at least we shall have done our duty; which, we shall usually find in every sense, but constantly in the best, is consulting our interest.

After all that hath been said, there may sometimes remain doubts concerning the extent of the repose, enjoined by this precept. And then our best rule will be, on the one hand, not to take liberties beyond the permission of the laws, and the practice of the more pious and considerate part of our neighbours; and, on the other, not to scruple what propriety and decency, and reasonable convenience require.

But farther, as hardly any one is capable of spending the whole, and very few near the whole, of our day of rest in religious exercises, to good purpose, it will be requisite to inquire, in the last place, how we are to employ the intervals and the remainder of it, which we need not or cannot employ thus.

Now there is nothing more fitly joined with acts of piety, than acts of charity; one excellent species of which, instructing and exhorting those who belong to us, hath been already mentioned; and extending the same good office, in a prudent manner, farther, as occasion serves, is an employment admirably suited to the day. Reconciling ourselves upon it to persons, between whom and us any displeasure hath been, is peculiarly recommended by the reason of the thing, as well as by a canon of our church †. Visiting the poor and sick, not

barely

* Col. iv. 1.

† Can. 13.

barely in the common meaning of the word, *visit*, but in the scriptural sense, of taking a kind notice of their wants, is not only directed by the same canon, but countenanced by St. *Paul*; who gave an order both to the Galatians and the Corinthians, in a particular exigency, (which is equally a good rule in others,) that each of them, on *the first day of the week*, should appropriate something towards the necessities of the faints, *as God had prospered him* *. And it is one delightful view of the day, to look on it as consecrated, amongst other excellent purposes, to that of forming and executing designs of tenderness and compassion to our distressed brethren.

But even where there is no room for doing what is commonly called charity, mere friendly intercourse and conversation, with our relations, neighbours and acquaintance, (if it take not up too much time,) is a demonstration of good will, which contributes greatly to our mutual happiness. And God's providing the frequent return of a day, when all the world should be released from confinement and toil, and at liberty to shew themselves in the most advantageous and pleasing light to each other, (a liberty which few in proportion would ever enjoy, were it not for this their Sabbath,) is an action worthy of our gracious Maker, and of unspeakable moment for promoting courtesy, affability, and kind affections. But it is more especially useful for softening and polishing the rugged tempers and manners of the lower sort of men; who ought, on many accounts, highly to value their festival days, which one of the principal Heathen philosophers, *Plato* saith, the Gods appointed in pity to mankind †. It was not therefore intended, that we should pass our Lord's day in sullen retirement, shunning human converse, or infecting each other with melancholy. The Jews were bid to *rejoice* in their feasts *before the Lord their God* ‡. Christians are bid to *rejoice in the Lord always* §. And a very ancient father, *Tertullian*, informs us, that *on the Sunday*, for so he calls it, *they indulged* peculiarly to joy ||, as well they might, since he who died *for our sins*, then rose *for our justification* ¶. Indeed, would we but practise Christianity as we ought, we should

* 1 Cor. xvi. 1, 2.

† Plat. de Leg. l. 2.

‡ Lev. xxiii. 40. Deut. xii. 12, 18. xvi. 11. xxvii. 7.

§ Phil. iv. 4.

|| Apol. c. 16.

¶ Rom. iv. 25.

should find its promises of pardon and strength, its beneficial precepts, and glorious prospects, the assurance of God's love to us, and the exertion of our own love to him and our fellow-creatures, matter of the highest joy, both within ourselves, and amongst each other. And we are much to blame, that we banish religious topics from our discourse; which might be, if properly introduced, the most delightful part of it. Not that lower subjects of agreeable and cheerful conversation need be at all excluded from a share in the day; for harmless good humour is an amiable and useful virtue. Only we must take singular care now of what we should remember always, that nothing censorious or uncharitable, nothing profane or indecent, nothing too light and ludicrous, come out of our mouths; nothing unworthy of rational and religious persons. By such behaviour and communication, we shall observe the full import of the prophet *Isaiab's* direction to the Jews, that they should *honour the Sabbath, not doing their own ways, nor finding their own pleasure, nor speaking their own words* *. This doth not mean, that whatsoever was pleasing was for that reason to be avoided by them; but that exercises of piety ought then to be their chief pleasure; and nothing unsuitable to them, however pleasing, done or uttered. They were not to say, *Our lips are our own; who is Lord over us* †? but at this time especially to prefer innocence before inclination.

And as cheerful discourse is not forbidden on the day, so neither is a cheerful use of God's creatures, who *bath given us richly all things to enjoy* ‡. The religious governor *Nehemiah*, after the people had been assembled to hear the law, dismissed them with these words: *Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy unto our Lord* §. And it is said of the first Christians, immediately after the mention of their worship, as if it followed immediately after, that *they did eat their meat with gladness, and singleness of heart, praising God* ||. But then both over plentiful indulgence, and luxurious delicacy, making the gratification of our appetite a serious study, or in the expressive language of scripture, *a God*

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* Isa. lviii. 13.

† Ps. xii. 4.

‡ 1 Tim. vi. 17.

§ Neh. viii. 10.

|| Acts ii. 46, 47.

of our belly *, is very inconsistent, not only with the business of the day, but with our whole profession. And yet more so are intemperance and debauchery, which profane our Sabbath beyond comparison worse than labouring upon it would do; pervert it from the service of God to that of the devil; and make it a public mischief instead of a blessing. To prevent this therefore, every one ought carefully to watch over himself, parents over their children, heads of houses over their families, and magistrates over the whole community. For very few things would either do inferiors more good, or entitle superiors to a larger share of divine favour, than if the latter would enable themselves to say, with the excellent governor above-mentioned: *I commanded to sanctify the Sabbath-day: Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and spare me, according to the greatness of thy mercy* †.

8 But here a question may be put: Supposing vice be avoided, may not amusements and diversions be allowed? Now, in the first place, who are they that ask this? Persons that neglect religious duties. They have no right to ask it. Let them do what is commanded on the day, before they examine what is permitted; else their inquiry comes only to this, Whether they may disregard it from beginning to end? For such to plead for relaxations after the business of the day is over, when, God knows, their whole business upon it hath been idleness or worse, is beyond measure absurd. And, therefore, when some recreations on Sunday, in the afternoon, were unadvisedly permitted by authority, for a while, above an hundred years ago, they who had not first attended both morning and evening service, were expressly forbidden to partake of them. And of those who do attend the service of God, very few desire them. Such of the labouring and lower sort of the trading people, as profess any seriousness, are well content with indulging themselves afterwards at home in amicable conversation, or abroad in a friendly visit, or the refreshment of going for a while to contemplate the beauties of the creation, which this day was appointed, amongst other things, to commemorate. And they are very sensible, that taking liberties at all, considerably greater, would be unfit and unsafe.

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* Phil. iii. 19.

† Neh. xiii. 22.

The minds of men, even while they were at church, would be running on the diversions that were to follow : They would be tempted by them to neglect, perhaps entirely, religious exercises in private : their amusements would grow to be light and indecent, or tumultuous and mischievous, or both : expences and excesses, drunkenness and debaucheries, quarrels and disorders, would attend them : the day would come by degrees to be regarded as a day of sport only ; and if once pious thoughts were banished at the time peculiarly appointed for them, when would they find a place in our hearts ?

Now if these considerations ought to weigh, and do weigh, with those who are almost constantly kept to business, and for whom alone, on that account, the recreations formerly allowed, were intended and calculated ; much more may they, who have leisure for them nearly as often as they will, and perhaps employ a great deal too much of the remainder of the week in them, afford without murmuring to distinguish one day in seven, by abstaining from them. Still the few of those, who do not abstain from them, and yet behave like serious persons in other instances, ought to be respected as such ; and judged of, in this particular, with moderation and charity. But surely, at the same time, they should be asked, Where is the need, where is the good, of these indulgences of yours on the Lord's day ? If you are very fond of them, you ought, as reasonable creatures, and moral agents, to mortify a fondness, for which you can have no just ground. And if you are indifferent about them, for what cause do you affect to make this innovation : contrary, we apprehend, to religion ; contrary, you must own, to the laws and usages of your country ? Is it to shew, that you think farther than the vulgar ? Shew it in somewhat better. Indeed, think a little farther still, and you will see, that compliance with wise customs, is a wise thing. And why is not that custom such, which hath obtained universally amongst us, till of late, in this matter ? Is the observation of this day grown so excessively strict within these few years, that there is a necessity of taking new methods to relax it ? Are all your servants grown so immoderately scrupulous, that you must try to weaken the force of principle in them, by giving them to understand, that you have but little of it yourselves ? For while they conceive

you to violate the Sabbath, they will conceive you to disregard God. Is this then the light, in which you would have them; in which you would have other serious persons consider you? Whether they will inveigh against you, or only grieve for you, why should you give them cause to do either? Why should you countenance and encourage the profane, tempt the conscientious, by your example, to do what they inwardly condemn, or help to make them look ridiculous, if they stand out? But, indeed, could you bring all people into your own opinion, would it be desirable? Are not amusements, and particularly that of play, grown much too general, and frequent, and expensive, already? And why would you increase it thus? Why would you have the lower part of the world, whom happily their business preserves from such things on other days, come to think them lawful on this, when they have full leisure for them, and may argue very plausibly in favour of their own inclinations from the practice of their superiors? Must not the introduction of these liberties probably keep them often from church, almost always from being the better for going thither; give them quite a wrong turn, waste their small profits and earnings, and drive them to many unjust methods of repairing their losses and supplying their extravagancies; by which, I need not tell you, their betters must be sufferers? On these accounts, an author, not suspected of any religion, whom I quoted in my first discourse on this subject, had however policy enough to see, and lay it down for a rule, that diversions ought to be strictly prohibited on the Lord's day. Indeed, besides these particular bad effects, the use of them on that day must contribute in general to perpetuate, without intermission, an eagerness for pleasure and entertainment, irreconcilable with a spirit of piety, and to exclude serious thought even at the most serious times.

It hath been said, that such employment is better than talking and hearing scandal. But I am afraid the former by no means prevents the latter. Or say it did, where is the necessity of either? If our amusements alone restrain us from evil-speaking, we should put ourselves without delay under the influence of better motives. It hath been pleaded also, that diversions are used in other countries on Sunday evenings, without harm. But in some they are used at that time, be-
cause

cause they consider the Sunday as over at that time: for they begin to observe it strictly the evening before, and we do not. But still many of them think even this an insufficient defence of the practice; though travellers may happen, and no wonder, to be chiefly acquainted with the freer sort. That it doth no harm, is easily said, but hard to be proved. And were it to do but little, where men have been long accustomed to it, and are withheld, by a more general seriousness, and a severer exercise of authority, from abusing it; yet it may do infinite mischief, where it comes recommended by the charms of novelty; and is so unlikely, so impossible, to be confined within moderate bounds, as in this most licentious nation. We have much more need therefore to learn from foreign countries their practice of going to church both the morning and afternoon of the day, than of recreations in the close of it: for it is extremely perverse to reject their authority in the former case, while we rely on it in the latter. And surely, upon the whole, every good, every prudent person, instead of being zealous to propagate things of this nature, must see cause to discourage them, at least by abstaining from them; and to labour in every way, both for their own sakes and that of the public, to preserve, (what there is much want of increasing,) the small remainder of Christianity that is left amongst us. Considered in our private capacities, our business here is, not to please ourselves without regard to consequences, but so to spend the few Sabbaths and few days, which we have to come on earth, that we may be qualified, at the end of them, to enter into that eternal Sabbath, that *rest, which remaineth for the people of God** in heaven. And considered as a nation, we have great cause to remember, for our direction, the promise and the warning, which God gave the Jews for theirs: *If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing my pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight; the holy of the Lord, honourable—I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father*†: *But if ye will not hearken unto me, to hallow the Sabbath day—I will kindle a fire in the gates of Jerusalem, and it shall devour the palaces thereof, and shall not be quenched*‡.

S E R.

* Heb. iv. 9.

† Isa. lviii. 13, 14.

‡ Jer. xvii. 27.

S E R M O N CXV.

ON THE GREAT, BUT LITTLE UNDERSTOOD, DUTY OF MODERATION IN SENTIMENT AND MANNERS.

PHIL. iv. 5.

Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.

THE word *moderation* signifies, in the original, that reasonableness of mind, which curbs the exorbitancies of all our passions, appetites and imaginations; confining us to proper degrees of being affected by the things about us, and of exerting ourselves in relation to them: from which larger meaning, it is naturally and easily contracted to express more especially the due restraints of desire and anger, fear and sorrow. In discoursing upon it, therefore, I shall so treat of the temper in general, as to have a more immediate regard to these instances of it in particular, whilst I endeavour to recommend the virtue of moderation:

I. From its conduciveness to the practice of our duty.

II. From its good influence on the happiness of our lives here on earth.

III. From its importance to that succeeding state, the near approach of which the text places in our view.

I. I would shew how conducive the keeping all our inward movements within just limits, is to the practice of our duty. But here it must be observed, that a merely natural vehemence of spirit, is not strictly an actual sin, though it be one of the consequences of our original depravity, which we have usually much cause to lament. For it always puts us on a harder

harder trial than persons of a cooler temperament have to undergo. Yet still, the greater is our virtue if we stand this trial; and the less our guilt, if we sometimes fail, from infirmity or surprise. But if we act wrong, through gross negligence or deliberate indulgence, that we were strongly inclined to it, is no good excuse; for as we could not but know our inclination, we ought to have watched against it, and checked it. Therefore it is not the warmth of temper with which we are born, and against which we strive, but the wilful or heedless indulgence of it, that unfits us for the duties of life.

We are all of us very sensible, in the main, what those duties are. We seldom err much in any particular, when we really desire to know what is incumbent on us: the fitness of pious and virtuous behaviour is evident to our understandings, and the esteem of it natural to our hearts. A stranger to human affairs would, from this account, immediately conclude, that surely scarce any one ever missed then of doing as he ought. We are unhappily too well acquainted with them to judge thus; and see the case to be so very much otherwise, that, had we no other guide to direct our inquiries than our own reason, it would be impossible for us to say, with any certainty, how we come to be so inconsistent with ourselves. But when once the scripture hath taught us, that we have lost the primitive strength and uprightness in which God created man, all the rest is easy.

For we are surrounded here, on every side, with worldly objects, capable of giving us pleasure and pain; and of stirring up, in our corrupted natures, excessive emotions of desire, hope, fear, anger, sorrow. These passions importunately solicit our attention; and, according to the degree in which they are gratified, engross it to themselves, till we find so many earthly things to long after or to dread, to love or to hate, to rejoice in or to lament; and that with such immoderate earnestness, that virtue and religion are seldom thought of, and seldomer still to any good purpose: their obligations are, at some times, with miserable subtlety eluded; and at others resolutely and desperately broken through, even when we see what we are doing, and see the consequences.

These are the daily effects of being too strongly moved by the things of this life. And they are bitter streams, that will flow till the fountain of our hearts * is healed and *purified by faith* †, in that grace which our blessed Lord hath procured for us by his death, and offers to us in his gospel. Whatever we allow to make the greatest impression upon our minds, that will have the greatest influence on our conduct; and by degrees exclude every thing else. It is our Saviour's determination, that *no man can serve two masters* ‡; that is, when their commands interfere. We may, indeed, change from one to another, and so be faithful to neither, and displease both. But whatever we permit for the present to engage our attention, that for the present we shall pursue, and pass by or trample upon every thing else which may stand in our way to it. Thus, if we indulge considerably the love of pleasure, of gain, of advancement, we may design indeed, or think we design, along with it, to keep within the bounds of temperance, of justice, of humility, and preserve a due regard to the interests of a future state; but these purposes will be ineffectual: the objects to which our fallen nature is prone, will, by the help of but a little partiality in their favour, fill our souls, and bias our actions. Again: if we suffer ourselves to be discomposed by the happiness of others, we shall grow envious; if by injuries from others, we shall grow revengeful. If we let the more harmless passions of fear and sorrow become predominant, we shall unfit ourselves for usefulness in our stations, and weaken our sense of gratitude for the blessings of life. If we only give a loose to unmeaning fancy and caprice, we shall degrade the dignity of our species, and be hurried, not only into folly, but sin. In what way soever inclination bears us along, beyond the sober dictates of reason, we shall be continually, and almost irresistibly, tempted to overlook and transgress those rules of duty, which a better command of ourselves would have enabled us to perceive, and disposed us to observe.

Our Maker expects from us, that we should first measure the value of things rightly, then esteem them suitably to it.
And

* 2 Kings i. 21, 22. James iii. 2.

† Acts xv. 9.

‡ Matth. vi. 24. Luke xvi. 13.

And almost the only error by which we fail of this, is being affected too much by the concerns of the present world, and from thence too little by those of the next. There is, it must be owned, a great variety of wickedness amongst men, and sins directly opposite to each other. But in one point they agree notwithstanding; that the commission of them all is greatly owing to the same inconsiderate eagerness, by which we paint to ourselves things here below in much too strong colours, and receive such deep impressions from them, as efface, for the time at least, all the dictates of prudence and of conscience. Indeed, over-much vehemence, even in matters that appear to have no tendency towards guilt, is both wrong in itself, and habituates men to the same vehemence on worse occasions. Nay, zeal for things that seem, or even are, good and laudable, if it exceed bounds, frequently misguides great numbers, either to mistake very strangely what they mean to aim at, or to use methods for attaining it which are quite unjustifiable. This hath been so dreadfully the case in political and religious disputes, that every one disposed to uncommon heat about either, hath peculiar need to examine his heart, whether what he imagines to be necessary earnestness in the cause of God or his country, be not wholly or in part sinful impetuosity; and to watch carefully against that extreme, which may be as bad, or worse than the lukewarm indifference of others.

Moderation then, about every thing relative to this world, is highly requisite for the practice of our duty. I proceed now to shew you,

II. That it is not less for the present happiness of our lives.

Every one of our passions, appetites and inclinations, when raised too high, is capable of giving us very uneasy agitations of mind; and some, if indulged at all beyond reason, are grievously painful to ourselves, and many ways prejudicial to those amongst whom we live. They, of course, will be enticed or provoked to the same unreasonableness of which they have seen us guilty: and thus it is, that sins and sufferings propagate one another, and increase without end. But here I would consider more distinctly the bad consequences of immoderate desire and anger, fear and grief.

They that will not restrain their desires, must often earnestly wish for satisfaction, which they cannot in the least hope to obtain; and this directly brings on repinings, despondence, misery. And usually such as do hope, will also fear; and continue, perhaps a long time, in a very disagreeable suspense between both. Or let hope, if it can, be so strong as to exclude fear, and full expectation give the utmost pleasure, not to say, that such pleasure, whilst it lasts, is tumultuous, wastes the spirits, and wears the frame; only think how often, in a world so uncertain, it will vanish all at once; and what effects a sudden fall from this paradise must have on a mind impatient and undisciplined! But supposing no such disappointment to happen; persons of an eager and restless temper, after gaining one point, are apt to be immediately just as solicitous about another; so they are always in pursuit, and never contented. *What hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun? All his days are sorrows, and his travel grief: yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This also is vanity*.* Very gentle and governable desires would sufficiently excite us to consider what is really worth acquiring, and to bestow upon it the labour which it deserves. Besides, not uncommonly people miss the object of their wishes, merely by over-great anxiety about obtaining it. And being anxious for any thing beyond its capacity of giving us true happiness, can do us no service, but much harm it easily may. Now, that the several things which mankind run after so passionately, do not make them happy, is a notorious fact. Every day we see those, who have been the most successful in the race, as miserable as any; or we might see it, if we would, with the least reflection. And to what is it then that they are sacrificing the real present enjoyment of their beings?

Another passion, in which we are extremely prone to be excessive, and wretched by the excess, is anger. We let very small matters move us very greatly; sometimes imaginary faults of others; and so we disquiet and torment ourselves, as well as them, without any manner of cause. A little study of moderation would prevent all this, and more evil; would suppress

* Eccl. ii. 22, 23.

suppress that absurd unreasonableness, which puts us often out of humour, and now and then violently, without knowing why we are so; would teach us to distinguish (which we commonly forget to do), those who have not offended us from those who have; and would never allow us to punish the innocent with the guilty. For want of this, resentment boils within us, and perhaps flames out to our extreme hurt, in several respects, against such as very innocently, from accident or ignorance, or a just regard to themselves or their friends, or, it may be, a kind one to us, stand in the way of any thing that we want to do or have. But even supposing that men really treat us ill, yet it must be our wisdom and our interest to consider coolly what alleviations may be pleaded; what mistake or inadvertence of theirs, what indiscretion of ours, or suggestion of others, may have occasioned the misdemeanor. And a calm temper will presume, that there may be alleviations, where none appear. Or if there be none, it would still reflect, that in this world things will go wrong, and human creatures act amiss; that we must prepare ourselves for such events, and not be shocked at them; that the offender is our brother, whom we ought to love; and that, with all his faults, we are but too like him; subject, if not to the same, yet to others; and possibly, all circumstances weighed, nearly as bad, or worse. Now, such reflections, made habitual, would contribute unspeakably to the tranquillity and comfort of our lives. Anger always gives pain to him who feels it; and we should avoid feeling that pain as much as we can. It rises also, with amazing suddenness, almost in spite of us, if once we give it vent, to the most unexpected and pernicious extremities. Even the lower degrees of it displease, and are intended to displease, the persons against whom it is expressed: this excites them to make such returns as cannot fail to be uneasy to us, but often do us great, and lasting, and irreparable mischief: and from hence a very large part of the misery that men undergo, proceeds. We have but seldom really considerable provocations; and therefore it is absurd to be affected, as if we had them frequently: and how considerable soever they may be, it is highly imprudent to let ourselves be hurried away, we know not whither, by a blind and injurious rage, the parent of innumerable in-

conveniences and fruitless repentance, instead of *possessing our souls in patience* *; and endeavouring to remove, by *meekness of wisdom* †, whatever would make our passage through life uncomfortable. But we ought to be singularly mild towards those who in reality give us no provocation; as they certainly do not, who only presume to differ from us in opinion, be it in religion or politics, or any other point. Yet such differences have produced more of that *wrath of man*, which *worketh not the righteousness of God* ‡, more bitter contentions, and more shocking barbarities, even amongst the professed disciples of the *meek and lowly* § Jesus, than almost any other cause hath done any where on earth.

Two other passions, nearly allied, which often run to a miserable excess, are fear and grief: as indeed, when desire of and delight in any thing of this world is too vehement, the apprehension of losing it will be vehement in proportion. And therefore we must endeavour to moderate the two former of these emotions, if we would moderate the latter effectually. But indeed, we can often be much afflicted on parting with that in which we had little pleasure, and extremely disturbed with fear of what is by no means likely to happen; or, if it should happen, would do us but little harm; and will certainly do us not the less, but the more, for being immoderately disquieted about it beforehand, or grieved at it afterwards. But I shall dwell no longer on these two passions, because the weakness and wretchedness of indulging them is universally acknowledged; though that acknowledgment is far from putting men sufficiently on their guard against them. Only it should be added here, that avoiding excess of anxiety, under the troubles of life, as it is a very common meaning of the word translated *moderation*, was that, in all likelihood, which St. Paul had chiefly in his mind. For it immediately follows: *Be careful for nothing; but in every thing, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God: and the peace of God shall keep your hearts and minds, through Jesus Christ* ||.

Here, therefore, I shall conclude this head. For there would be no end of reckoning up minutely the instances of
being

* Luke xxi. 19.

† James iii. 13.

‡ James i. 20.

§ Matth. xi. 29.

|| Phil. iv. 6, 7.

being too strongly agitated by worldly things, and the mischiefs that follow it : precipitate judgments, rash resolutions, and hasty choices, made and persevered in ; partial fondnesses, unreasonable aversions, endless animosities, obstinate pursuits of our own ruin ; then utter discontent with ourselves, the whole world, and the Maker of it ; every folly, every sin and suffering, of which an ungoverned mind is capable.

Thus then the present wisdom appears of diligently cultivating, and, I must add (for without it all your diligence will be in vain), earnestly praying for that calmness and *moderation* of spirit, which the apostle requires that we should not only have, but should also *let it be known unto all men* : an expression comprehending several particulars of great moment ; that we should not be satisfied with our own opinion ; that we rule our passions well (a matter about which we are daily deceived), but proceed in the discipline of them, till every one else allows us to be masters ; that the good effects of our composure should be perceived and felt, not only at some times, and by some persons, but always by all who are concerned with us ; and, lastly, that we should be careful to shew the world around us, by our example, set before them with decency and modesty, how possible, how becoming, how beneficial, the practice of this virtue is.

And the motive, subjoined to this precept, is a powerful one indeed ; which, therefore, I proposed to lay before you

III. Its importance to our obtaining a favourable sentence in the approaching day of judgment, and eternal blessedness in our future life. *Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.*

However plainly it appears, that strict self-government is the true secret for self-enjoyment here, yet the whole world hath agreed and resolved upon it, that the contrary shall be true ; that the life for a man to lead, who will make the most of his time on earth, is in a course of eager desires, vehement pursuits, and high expectations, unbounded indulgence in what he likes, and keen resentments against all that would disappoint him. Each confirms the other in this way of thinking and acting. That we see one another miserable by it, nay, feel ourselves to be so, this avails not ; we go on still ; and scarce any one hath the courage to trust himself, and call
2 the

the judgment of mankind in question. If it must be so then, let that point be insisted on no longer. But be the happiness of this life what it will; yet if this life be not all; if it be but a small part of what we are concerned in, it will deserve but a small part of our attention. And looking on human affairs in this light, will soon place before us a very different scene from that which usually attracts our eye. Here we are pursuing pleasures, riches, rank, power, some imagination or another, belonging solely to this present state of things, as our great good: our whole hearts are engaged and overwhelmed in fears and hopes, and joys and sorrows, arising from these objects, and nothing else; for any continuance affects them. Yet all the while, this present state, and every thing in it, is confessedly a trifle, compared to that eternal one, which is to follow. What are we about then, and how unaccountably do we deceive ourselves! We are not really miserable, if things go contrary to our wishes here: we are not truly happy, if they go according to them. This world looks considerable, because its objects are near and glaring; but it deludes us. The whole that we have to do with it, is the least and meanest part of the business of our existence: and the time will come, when we shall see its enjoyments and its sufferings, all it can promise or threaten, to be nothing; and that the difference between having gone through it in prosperous or adverse circumstances, is not worth mentioning. Now, what we shall see to be true hereafter, is true at present: and we should endeavour to be affected by it accordingly. If we were, we should be little affected by any thing besides; but should pass our days in a happy calm; and pity those, who voluntarily fill theirs with disturbance and hurry; *walk in a shadow, and disquiet themselves in vain* *.

But the thought of a future state hath a yet further and stronger influence in this case. The felicity of it is provided for those only, who have made themselves fit for it, through the help of God's grace, by an innocent behaviour, and religious frame of soul; neither of which is consistent with being attached and given up to the things here below. A heart and affections tied down to them, will grow like them; be-

come

* Pf. xxxix. 6-7.

come earthly and base, insensible of pious and virtuous movements, unmeet for *the inheritance of the saints in light* *. If any man love the world inordinately, *the love of the Father is not in him* †. They are different spirits, thwarting each other continually; and we have only to chuse of which we will be, for of both we cannot.

And it is a most weighty consideration towards determining our choice, that the time which we have, either for busying and gratifying ourselves here, or preparing for hereafter, is of small duration. For *the Lord is at hand*. All that we can hope or dread, enjoy or suffer, in the present state, will soon be over, possibly very soon; and all that we can do to qualify us for the next, how much soever we want, must be done in a very short space of time. The holy and self-denying Jesus, who expects and will assist us to imitate him, but will cast us off entirely if we neglect it, he hath said, *Behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give to every man according as his work shall be* ‡. The truth of these things we all know; the consequences of them we all must see; and no words can make them plainer.

Not that either the affections or the appetites of our nature are to be extirpated, but only confined within due bounds. The necessities of each one's condition in life are still to be provided, because they are necessities. The duties, which we owe to each other here, are diligently to be done, because they are duties. The comforts of life too, as they ought to be thankfully received, may doubtless be cheerfully used. Nay, even as to the lighter amusements, if we make them not a business, but a relaxation only, at fit times, and in a fit degree; since our infirmity may demand a little of them, that little cannot but be lawful. It is, in truth, if we would consider justly, a very humbling reflexion to think we need them; but since we do, so much as we need must be innocent. And to perplex ourselves with scruples about small matters of this kind, would be at once distrusting the goodness of God, instead of enjoying it properly; and making our lives uneasy to ourselves, and religion unamiable to others. But though errors on this side ought to be mentioned, and are very pitiable

* Col. i. 12.

† 1 John ii. 15.

‡ Rev. xxii. 12.

able when they happen ; yet they are far from being common. It is the opposite extreme that mankind in general want to be guarded against. Let us then remember, that whatever lengths we go in the indulgence of any inclination beyond what is on one account or another plainly requisite, we should be sure to proceed with serious caution ; for human virtue is very weak, and the solicitations of things present very powerful. In reason indeed they are of small moment ; but in fact they are infinitely difficult to fit loose to them, and reserve our souls for worthier objects. *Take heed therefore to yourselves, that you say not in your hearts, my Lord delayeth his coming, and either begin to smite your fellow-servants, or to eat and drink with the drunken : take heed, lest your hearts be overcharged with the cares or the pleasures, the resentments or the sorrows of this life ; and that day come upon you unawares* *. For this I say, brethren, the time is short. It remaineth, that they that weep, be as though they wept not ; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not ; they that buy, as though they possessed not ; and they that use this world, as though they used it not. For the fashion of this world passeth away †.

* Matth. xxiv. 48, 49. Luke xxi. 34.

† I Cor. vii. 29, 30, 31.

S E R M O N CXVI.

ON THE CONTRAST OF RESPECT AND REMEMBRANCE, AND OF
CONTEMPT AND FORGETFULNESS TO GOOD AND BAD MEN.

PROV. X. 7.

*The memory of the just is blessed : but the name of the wicked
shall rot.*

FROM these words I shall endeavour to shew,

I. How great a concern men naturally have to leave an honourable memory behind them.

II. What care God hath taken, that both the good and the bad shall be esteemed after death, as they deserve.

III. What care we ought to take of the same thing.

I. That men have naturally an earnest solicitude to leave an honourable memory behind them.

This indeed is not expressed, but evidently implied in the text ; which being doubtless intended as a motive to good actions, and a discouragement from bad, can yet be neither, unless mankind are influenced by regard to future fame : which indeed they are to a very high degree. All men, in all ages, with extremely few exceptions, if any, have both desired and endeavoured, that others should entertain a good opinion of them ; and, if possible, a great one. To this pursuit, multitudes have sacrificed their ease, their interest, the dearest of their other passions, and their lives themselves. They who have failed in it, have given the strongest, and sometimes most shocking and fatal, proofs of their uneasiness : they who have succeeded, have always expressed the highest joy in the acquisition, and been celebrated and envied as happy persons. Even the lowest part of the world have thought the esteem of their acquaintance, were the circle of them ever so narrow

or mean, well worth having : And the most destitute of any considerable advantage or accomplishment to be valued for, have still set up some claim to reputation, were it a trifling, were it a groundless, were it an absurd one, rather than have none. They, who know they have forfeited their title to a good character, labour hard however, by concealing and palliating matters, to retain as much as they can of it. And even the abandoned to wickedness, who know their fellow-creatures in general must abhor them, still aim at a little comfort from the wretched applauses of their accomplices. They who take pains to get over the love of reputation, manifest, in spite of themselves, the utmost fondness for it, whenever they can have it ; and often grievous longings after it, in those very cases, where they have destroyed it irrecoverably with their own hands. Even they who affect to ridicule it as a folly and a cheat, have usually nothing else in view than to obtain it, for a pretended sagacity in detecting the cheat. Nay, such as think their duty binds them to extirpate it from their breasts, as a frailty and a sin, certainly think they deserve, and almost constantly shew they expect, much the more of it on that account. A truly good person, indeed, will always, in the first place, *seek the honour, which cometh from God only* *. For if *we love the praise of men more than his* † ; our Saviour hath warned us, by the example of the Jews, who were highly guilty of this weakness, that we shall neither judge nor act as we ought. And it would be a justly ruinous mistake, either to do bad things for the favourable opinion of those around us, or good things *to be seen of them only*, and *have that for our reward* ‡ ; instead of *setting God always before us* §, and *seeking for glory, honour and immortality* ||, by approving our hearts and lives to him. But still, desire of being esteemed by our fellow-creatures, consistently with, and in subordination to, our Maker's approbation, is a natural, and therefore an innocent passion, prompts us to what is right, and supports us in it ; and surely we have need of every support. Nor doth reason only, but revelation recommend it to us, even in the more perfect dispensation of the New Testament

* John v. 44.
§ Pl. xvi. 8.

† John xii. 43.
|| Rom. ii. 7.

‡ Matth. vi. 1, 5.

ment itself; exhorting us to the practice of righteousness and peace from this motive: *For he that in these things serveth Christ, is acceptable to God and approved of men* *.

But we not only all desire an honourable repute, each according to his notion of it, in our lifetime; whilst it may be serviceable to us, to be thought well of, and must at least be pleasing to be told that we are; but we have earnest desires also of being remembered, as much to our advantage as possible, after we are gone. Accordingly, influenced by this hope, we both do and suffer a great deal to accomplish things, the credit of which we shall live but a very little while to enjoy; nay, which perhaps will never be known till we are dead: we vindicate ourselves to posterity, with almost as great solicitude, as to those of our own times; and feel it a powerful support under the heaviest censures that lie upon us now, if we can hope, that such as come after us, will judge more impartially, and hold us in esteem.

Yet, all the while, we have little or no imagination, that we shall be then within reach of hearing what is said of us; or, in any manner whatever, benefited by praise, or hurt by reproach. For which reason, some men, who are very sensible of what use a present good character is, have treated all concern for posthumous fame as a mere absurdity; and valued themselves upon detecting it. Now really if it were one, it would be so palpable a one, that finding it out would be no mighty discovery. But indeed it is a gracious and wise provision of our Maker, for the happiness of his creatures: and the contrary persuasion arises, not from depth of inquiry, but superficialness.

In many, if not most things, providence hath appointed our pleasure here below to proceed much more from pursuit and expectation beforehand, than from enjoyment afterwards; by which method, we have plainly some happiness both sooner and surer, than if it began only with the attainment of our wishes. It is true, we must also have some disappointment from hence; but this (besides that reason and experience will keep it from being excessive), may by religion be rendered extremely useful; as it shews, that complete and lasting sa-

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tisfaction

* Rom. xiv. 18.

tisfaction is not to be had on earth. Nay, if obtaining our desires were to give us no pleasure, indeed if we were never to obtain them, yet the pleasure we have in the prospect of obtaining them would certainly be valuable, in proportion to the degree of it; only abating for the uneasiness at last of finding ourselves mistaken. But now, in the case before us, though it were allowed that persons do not enjoy, after their deaths, the reputation in which they are then held, yet they enjoy it long before, and that without any abatement to follow at all: for surely they are not uneasy in the other world, for want of knowing how they are honoured in this.

Besides, as virtuous and beneficent actions are by far the most certain way of procuring any durable esteem from mankind, so planting in us a desire of such esteem as may endure when we are gone, is providing no small security for our good behaviour here; and, consequently, for our own happiness, and that of all with whom we are concerned; but particularly of our children, relations and friends, who will doubtless be more regarded on account of the fair character that we have left behind us, and incited to imitate that conduct for which they see our memory honoured.

So that this principle, far from being an imposition on mankind, and a prejudice to be rooted out, is an important blessing, conferred on us by Heaven, and diligently to be cherished, even were it absolutely certain, that the dead neither have, nor ever shall have, any knowledge of the respect that is continued to them after their decease. But indeed it is by no means certain, that good persons departed may not, in their present intermediate state, or however in that after the last judgment, receive considerable delight from knowing, some way or other, that the characters which they have deserved, have not been denied them, but honourably paid by their survivors. For as the desire of being esteemed, is a natural principle, and one which worthy men, beyond others, cultivate and improve, why should we doubt of its subsisting hereafter, and being gratified? It is true, the blessed in heaven will be much above feeling pain from any injurious treatment of their names on earth; but why may they not enjoy pleasure from a just regard shewn them? especially as this pleasure comprehends in it rejoicing that others do their du-

ty, and that too such a part of their duty, as must singularly encourage the general practice of virtue. Besides, the good influence of their memory is one way, amongst others, by which they have faithfully endeavoured to be useful amongst men; and why should not the knowledge, that they have in some degree at least succeeded, be one ingredient in their reward?

No wonder then, if we rejoice now in the prospect of what we may hope will give us joy to all eternity: no wonder if the wise son of *Sirach* directs us: *Have regard to thy name; for that shall continue with thee above a thousand great treasures of gold. A good life bath but a few days; but a good name endureth for ever**.

Still, it is extremely evident (and yet very needful to remind men who are strangely forgetful of it), that all this must be cautiously understood of such reputation only as is truly good; sought from proper motives, and pursued by proper means. For if people affect to be admired for excellencies, which they have not, their attempt of cheating mankind will probably be as vain, as it is certainly unjust. If they court fame by qualifications of little or no value, all that they can gain by it, will be of little or no use to the world or themselves; and if they aim at it by methods that do harm amongst men, the higher their ambition rises, and the more fully it succeeds, the greater misery they will bring down, not only on others, but on their own heads too. Yet how dreadfully large are the numbers of those who have aspired to reputation by the most insignificant accomplishments; either from not knowing them to be such, or from despair of acquiring better: of those, who, unwilling to labour honestly for a character, have thought to purchase it cheaper by falsehood and fraud; nay, of those also, who, not distinguishing between a great fame and a good one, or, however, preferring the former before the latter, have chosen rather to be talked of and wondered at for the surprising things which they have done (however mischievous), than esteemed and loved for such beneficent actions as they had in their power. And every one of these not only goes wrong himself, but contributes

* *Eccclus. xli. 12, 13.*

tributes to lead others into the same mistake, or to prevent their discerning it, when once made.

The happiness of men, therefore, is greatly concerned in avoiding such errors: and, as we are so very apt to fall into them, the goodness of God is very conspicuous in pointing them out so clearly in scripture; not only stigmatizing those *whose glory is in their shame**; but warning us against so excessive an admiration, even of things in themselves valuable, as interferes with the superior regard we owe to real piety and virtue. *Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches. But let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord*†. And though the word of God most frequently and chiefly insists on other and nobler motives to a due regulation of our love of fame, yet is it far from either forgetting or slighting this inferior one; that by a worthy conduct we shall obtain our desire, and by a criminal one fail of it entirely. *For the memory of the just is blessed: but the name of the wicked shall rot.* Let us therefore proceed to examine,

II. What care the goodness and justice of God have taken that both these things shall be so.

Now, two methods which he hath employed, have been mentioned already. He hath formed the hearts of men to esteem virtue, and abhor wickedness, wherever they see or remember it. And he hath made the happiness of men, private and public, greatly depend on the encouraging right actions by as durable honours as they can, and discountenancing wrong ones by as lasting infamy. So that if people will act suitably either to their best inward principles, or their evident interest, God hath made it secure, that the assertion laid down in the text shall be verified. And that, besides this general provision founded in our nature, there is also a particular providence, causing the memory of the just and good to flourish out of their ashes, and blasting that of the wicked, not only may be concluded, with very probable reason, from
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* Phil. iii. 19.

† Jer. ix. 23, 24.

the divine attributes, but collected from express declarations of scripture on this head. *The righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance : his horn shall be exalted with honour. The ungodly shall see it, and it shall grieve him ; he shall gnash with his teeth, and consume away : the desire of the ungodly shall perish **, and the candle of the wicked shall be put out †.

Undoubtedly it would be a more pleasing consideration to worthy men, and seemingly a more efficacious one, if they could always hope, that present respect would be paid to their characters whilst living, as well as future to their memories when dead. And for the most part it is paid in a good measure ; at least by such persons as they chiefly desire should approve their conduct ; and in such proportions, as are very sufficient to give them sensible comfort and spirit to go on. But still the deficiencies in this respect are great, and the causes of those deficiencies many. Sometimes the imperfection of their goodness, sometimes the strictness of those rules which they find necessary to preserve it, and sometimes also, for it must be owned, unnecessary peculiarities and imprudences which obscure it (as little faults will frequently hide great excellencies) ; these things, I say, often hinder very valuable men, though it is pity they should, from being esteemed in any tolerable degree like what they ought to be. And there are other yet greater hindrances, arising from other quarters : from the madness and wickedness of party zeal ; from the hatred of the vicious and irreligious to those who often must oppose them, and always by their example at least put them to shame ; from the envy of moderately good people, to such as one way or other come in competition with them ; and from the inattention of most people to present merit, seen familiarly by them every day.

But still, neither ought these things to be any discouragement to us, nor are they any objection to the wisdom of Providence. For, on the whole, it would probably not be to the advantage of good persons, but far from it, to have all the debt, which mankind owes them, paid immediately. It might endanger their humility, lead them to an uncharitable contempt of others, and a hazardous confidence in themselves.

Both

* Ps. cxii. 6, 9, 10.

† Prov. xxiv. 20.

Both their virtue and their peace would be less secure, the higher their reputation was raised; and the more they were influenced to what is good by the present applause of men, the less proof they would give to their own hearts, as well as to the world, of seeking the future approbation of God; and of acting from that faith in things unseen, which ought to be the main principle of their conduct, and shall be the main foundation of their reward. Therefore, instead of being so angry as we commonly are, when any one fails of doing our character justice; were they to do it ever so much injustice, we should throw resentment out of our thoughts, and look upon every outrage of this sort as a means of improving ourselves; and indeed as one good mark, that we are in some degree such as we ought. For it is our Saviour's rule: *If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you**. *Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets, which were before you†. Wo unto you, when all men shall speak well of you: for so did their fathers to the false prophets‡.*

But when once good men are removed to another state, all the reasons, which made it unsafe for them to receive praise in this, are over; and most of the reasons, that made others unwilling to bestow it, are over too. Oppositions of interests are then usually at an end; party animosities cool, unjust imputations disperse and clear up; some begin to recollect, that they have been too vehement against those that are gone; others, that they have been too negligent of them; their loss is felt; their good qualities now stand in no man's way; their good deeds may be told without suspicion of flattery; over their imperfections and singularities a veil is thrown, partly by time, partly by common humanity, which is acknowledged peculiarly due to the ashes of the dead; we are surprised, that we could fail of discerning their worth sooner; and we pay them a double honour in their graves, by way of amends for
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* John xv. 19.

† Matth. v. 11. 12.

‡ Luke vi. 26.

what we defrauded them of before ; not to say, that now and then we raise them a little higher, in hopes of depressing some that survive.

By these means it comes to pass, that though sometimes *there is no remembrance of the wise man more than of the fool*, (which appeared to *Soloman*, whenever it happened, so great an evil, that *he hated life* on account of it*;) yet, generally speaking, they who deserve well have at length due acknowledgments paid to their memory. More extensive merit will, as it ought, have more extensive commendation. But such as move in a narrower sphere obtain, perhaps full as constantly, all they wished for, and aimed at, in this respect: an honest repute, and friendly regret amongst their acquaintance. And those who are the least known ; who may seem, as the son of *Sirach* expresses it, to *have no memorial* ; but to *perish, as though they had never been* : if yet, as it follows in him, *they were merciful men*, it will be found, that *their righteousness hath not been forgotten*†. They will almost always have some witnesses to preserve the knowledge of their good desert ; often such as are little thought of : and though very small notice may seem to be taken of them at present, yet sooner or later they will be remembered ; and missed perhaps a great deal more, than if they knew it, they would wish. Nay, even such as *the world* hates and persecutes, because it *is not worthy of them*‡ ; against whom it conspires, as the Jews did against the prophet, saying, *let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name may be no more remembered*§ : if they have not, immediately on their deaths, the testimony borne them, which our Saviour, in the same case, had on his, *certainly this was a righteous man*|| ; yet, in process of time, they obtain, as the apostle speaks, *a good report through faith*¶. Or how long soever the piety and virtue of any persons may be hid and overwhelmed, yet, as he *who seeth* what is done *in secret, will reward them openly*** ; let them ever comfort themselves, with being well assured, that if the world overlooks, or even oppresses them for a while, it will not always do so : for the day is coming, of which Christ himself hath said, *Whosoever*

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* Eccl. ii. 16, 17. See also ix. 15.

† Eccles. xlv. 9, 10.

‡ Heb. xi. 38.

§ Jer. xi. 19.

|| Luke xxiii. 47.

¶ Heb. ii. 39.

** Matth. vi. 4.

*shall confess me before men, (as every one doth, that, from a principle of conscience adheres to his duty) him shall the Son of Man confess before the angels of God**. And then at least *shall the righteous*, in whatever obscurity involved before, and by whatever calumnies blackened, *shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their father †*; and *stand in great boldness before the face of such as afflicted them, and made no account of their labours; who esteemed their life to be madness, and their end without honour ‡*.

But as for the ungodly, it is not so with them § : The undeserved regard, which is too frequently paid them in their lives; as, generally speaking, it must be insincere, so it seldom outlasts them any considerable time: their prosperity, that dazzled the eyes of man, vanishes; the fear or the favour, for which they were courted, influences no longer: their power of concealing and disguising their ill deeds perishes with them; things, which they hoped were for ever buried in darkness, rise up against them; the superficial agreeableness of slighter good qualities, that gilded over their more important bad ones, coming now to be less tenderly handled, soon wears off, and leaves them visible in their full deformity; all who have been injured by them, and all who have been deceived in them, give vent to their indignation without restraint; their very partners in wickedness, instead of defending or excusing them, often designedly press down their memories under an aggravated load of imputations, to escape the more easily themselves; and even the candid and good-natured, however averse their inclination is to it, yet, from principle, give them up to the justice of public hate and infamy. Thus then doth *the name of the wicked rot*; becomes offensive to mankind, during all the while it lasts; and sometimes it lasts long, to be, as the scripture calls it, *a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse ||*; then moulders away, and falls gradually into oblivion, till the hour come, that *they who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt ¶*.

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* Luke xii. 8.

§ Ps. i. 5.

† Matth. xiii. 43.

|| Jer. xxiv. 9.

‡ Wisd. v. 1, 4.

¶ Dan. xii. 2.

You see therefore that God has not only declared in his holy word, that he will reward the good, and punish the bad in the next world ; but has also even in this so established the tendencies of things, that (supposing them to proceed at all in their course) virtue must at last be held in esteem, and vice in abhorrence. Nor will it be in the power of unwise or wicked men, though they do their worst, to prevent this in the main. Yet still, in many particular instances, we may, if we will, both by design and negligence, disappoint the purposes of heaven for the good of mankind. But if we apprehend it, as surely we must, to be our duty and our interest, rather to become labourers together *with God* *, and forward the execution of his all-wise counsels ; we shall be disposed to consider,

III. In what manner we may best contribute to the due payment of those very different regards, which belong to the memory of the bad and the good. For I beg leave, under this head, to invert the order of the text, and dispatch the disagreeable part of the subject first.

Nowhere, a principal thing to be observed is, that vehemence and bitterness are so unsuitable to the temper of religion, and yet we are so very prone to them, that whoever goes about to fix infamy on any one whom he dislikes, whether living or dead, should faithfully examine his own heart in the first place, and see *what spirit he is of* †. We cannot easily be too careful, (and it is very uncommon to be careful enough,) that neither the selfish passions of interest, envy, resentment, nor the excess of any more generous principle, concern for public good, for virtue, for religion itself, ever move us to do injustice to any man's character : that we judge as mildly, as with reason we possibly can ; and speak yet more mildly than we judge. For there are multitudes of things, that may lead us into mistakes, by which we may be guilty of grievous and cruel outrages against the reputation of persons, who have done nothing amiss, whilst we mean perhaps only to be zealous in a good cause. Nay, indeed, were there no danger of mistakes at all, severity of justice ill becomes creatures, so liable to faults as men are. And severity against the memo-

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* 1 Cor. iii. 9.

† Luke ix. 55.

ries of those, who are gone to answer for what they have done, hath so peculiar an appearance of inhumanity, that we should avoid it with double caution; whether they have lived in or near our own times, or in others ever so remote; though, in the former case, there is an additional consideration to restrain us, that unnecessary harsh treatment of worthless persons deceased, causes grief, that might well be spared, to their worthy relations and friends that survive.

But still we are by no means forbidden, after all, to express a moderate and prudent disapprobation of bad people, either during their lives or after their deaths. On the contrary, due distinctions ought to be made; and shewing the characters of such in their true light may be extremely requisite; sometimes for the justification of innocent men, and often for a warning to inconsiderate ones; that they may see, by the example of others, before it is too late, what sort of fame they must expect to leave behind them, if they will act contrary to their duty; that they may not confound, with real substantial honour, those empty distinctions of names and titles, which the worst of men too frequently transmit to their posterity; nor flatter themselves, that even, in this undiscerning world, there is any likelihood of *one event to the righteous and the wicked**, in point of reputation, whatever may happen in other respects. And especially, where admiration of any plausible character will probably seduce others into wrong conduct, there taking off the varnish from it, and exposing it naked to view, so far as may be requisite to prevent any dangerous mistakes, is an important duty.

But indeed, for the most part, the name of the wicked, if let alone, will rot of itself; and all that we shall need to do is, not to undertake the nauseous and fruitless office of embalming it. To endeavour this for private advantage, is one of the meanest and basest subserviencies to sin. And even where gratitude or relation may demand from us some regard for the memory of wicked men, we should, however, always content ourselves, with saying in their favour what we can with truth; and keeping silence, as much as we are able, concerning the rest; but by no means take it amiss, if every one else doth
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* Eccl. ix. 2:

not keep silence ; nor expect in the least, that they, who have deserved ill upon the whole, should be esteemed by mankind, merely because they have deserved well of us. For, by that rule, every wicked wretch upon earth, in his turn, must have a good character inviolably preserved to him.

But let us now proceed to the pleasing part of our duty, the honours that we owe to the memory of the just ; whether they lived in former days, or within our own knowledge.

Now, the regards due to them are briefly these : that we believe them, on proper evidence, to be the good persons they were in reality ; that we consider their virtues with due esteem, and their imperfections with due candour ; that we vindicate their names from unjust imputations, and make honourable mention of them, whenever a fit opportunity offers ; that we warn and arm ourselves against the temptations both of prosperity and adversity, by observing how they have gone through each ; that we incite ourselves to aim at more perfection in all Christian graces, by seeing in them what heights of piety and goodness are attainable ; that we learn watchfulness from their falls, and a speedy and thorough repentance from their rising again ; that we thank God, in our retirements, for the instructions which his providence hath vouchsafed to us in their good lives ; and beg of him wisdom and strength, to *walk* as they did, *not by the sight* of things present, *but the faith** of things to come.

It may be hoped, we are none of us so unhappy, as not to have had some such acquaintance amongst the great numbers of another sort, with whom we seldom fail to associate. And we are doubly to blame, if neither the good examples of ancient days, acknowledged by all men, nor the recent virtues that we have seen in our contemporaries, some of them perhaps endeared to us by nearness of relation, or ties of friendship, can attract our affections, and engage our imitation. Or if we have hitherto had no opportunity of being acquainted with such persons, yet, bad as the world is, they are still to be found in it ; and all that are weak in goodness, are especially concerned to seek them out, take shelter under
their

* 2 Cor. v. 7.

their protection, and invigorate themselves by their assistance. But, alas, instead of this, we attend almost only to such as can promote our worldly advantages, or favourite amusements, or such as enjoy an uncommon share of either; to those who can serve us, or delight us, we attach ourselves firmly; those who excel us in any part of the vanity and pride of life, we envy; account them the only happy men; and set our whole hearts on becoming happy in the same way: but serious, humble, self-denying worth, we either quite overlook, or view with an eye of scorn, at best of contemptuous pity; ridicule, if not inveigh against it, the truest piety and virtue, if it goes the least beyond that standard which we have fixed for ourselves, from no better authority than custom or inclination; and are commonly much more severe against the involuntary or imagined failings of the best people, than the wilful and habitual sins of the worst. Thus we behave to the good in their lives: or if we do happen to treat them a little better than, yet, instantly on their deaths, we lay them aside, and are glad to think no more of them, not even of our own obligations to them, though perhaps we have had very particular ones, and certainly a general one of great importance, that such persons are, as the scripture calls them, *the salt of the earth* *: preserve the world by their wholesome influence, though much too thinly spread over it, yet from being utterly corrupted; and so restrain and mitigate the wrath of God, by their prayers and intercessions, that he often *saves the city for the sake of the few righteous that are therein* †. Let us remember then, what reason we have to honour the good, both living and dead; and to mourn when *the faithful fail from among the children of men* ‡: let us observe, and point out to observation, the usefulness and amiableness of religion in others; and make it as useful and amiable in ourselves, as we possibly can: being not only admirers, but *followers also of them, who through faith and patience have inherited the promises* §. For loving and imitating them here, will qualify us for being happy in an eternal fellowship with them hereafter. And though it is a much lower consideration,

* Matth. v. 13. † Gen. xviii. 23. ‡ Ps. xii. 1. § Heb. vi. 12.

deration, yet it is far from a contemptible one, that by honouring the characters of the worthy persons who are gone before us, we shall best secure that surviving regard to our own, which we all desire : and when *our bodies are buried in peace, our name shall live* *, and *our memorial not depart away* †.

* Ecclus. xlv. 14.

† Ecclus. xxxix. 9.

SER-

S E R M O N CXVII.

(Preached on a General Fast.)

ON THE JUSTICE AND GOODNESS OF GOD TO THE RATIONAL
CREATION.

2 CHRON. XV. 2.

The Lord is with you, while ye be with him : and if ye seek him, he will be found of you : but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you.

THESE words are the beginning of a serious admonition, given by the direction of Heaven to the nation of the Jews, as they returned from obtaining, under the conduct of Asa their king, one of the greatest victories recorded in scripture. Their condition, after this, might have appeared to human policy a very secure one : But the Divine Wisdom saw the greatest of all dangers impending over them, that which proceeds from forgetting God, and abandoning virtue. *And the Spirit of the Lord came upon Azariah the son of Oded, and he went out to meet Asa, and said unto him, Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin : The Lord is with you, while ye be with him : and if ye seek him, he will be found of you : but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you.* Now, these great truths, of which Heaven thought it needful to remind them, at the conclusion of a prosperous war, it must be very much more needful that we should attend to, who seem to be only at the beginning of a doubtful one. And accordingly we are met here, by the command of authority, to consider our ways,

and humble ourselves before God for our sins, as the necessary means for deriving a blessing on our arms, and restoring and perpetuating peace and prosperity to our country.

It is a melancholy consideration, that creatures, endued with reason and humanity, should ever come to employ force against one another, and make the dreadful addition of the miseries of war to the many unavoidable sufferings of life. But wicked as this is, when passion and resentment, desire of unjust gain, or fondness of infamous glory, prompts to it, yet when injuries of pernicious consequence are done to a nation, and persisted in, and no competent redress can be obtained, it becomes then, both necessary for particular societies, and beneficial to human society in general, that invaded rights be vigorously asserted by the only way left. When the sword is drawn for justice alone, and ever ready to be sheathed as soon as that is granted, then Heaven may be appealed to, with hopes of a favourable *sentence coming forth from his presence, whose eyes behold the thing that is equal* *. But if the assertors of a righteous cause be in other respects a sinful people, it is evidently just for God, who hath the cognizance of both these things, to regard whichever of them infinite wisdom shall direct; and make even the injurious party *the rod of his anger, and the staff in the day of his indignation* †, to correct, or destroy, if their wickedness deserve it, such nations, as though right in their disputes with their enemies, are wrong at the same time in matters more important. And how little terror soever our enemies might give us at first, yet now we must be sensible, that we know not in the least how soon and how formidably they may increase; but this we know certainly, that *there is no restraint to the Lord*, to punish, as well as *to save, by many, or by few* ‡. Times of war, therefore, add a peculiar strength to those admonitions, which reason and scripture give us at all times, to consider what our state is with regard to him, *who doth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth* §. Let us then all consider now, whether we have ground of hope or of fear from that awful declaration of the prophet, which you have heard read.

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* Psal. xvii. 2.

† Is. x. 5.

‡ 1 Sam. xiv. 6.

§ Dan. iv. 35.

The Lord is with you, while you be with him. To be with God, is to preserve in our minds a reverent sense of his being, presence, and government; to keep close to his laws, and stand on his side against the opposite power of darkness and sin. Let us then think, if there be need of thought to answer, how is the reverence due to the Supreme Being preserved among us? Have we not persons who even ridicule the notion of a wise and good Maker of all things? Have we not those, who, if they do admit a Creator, do not admit a Moral Governor of the world; or at least represent him so very defective in his administration of it, as finally to let bad persons be gainers by their wickedness, and good persons losers by their virtue: rejecting, with mirthful scorn, what hath ever been the hope and support of wise and good men, the belief of that future state, in which the visible irregularities of the present shall be rectified? Have we not also too many, who, professing perhaps to believe in natural religion, yet speak of Christianity, the great means by which it is both supported and perfected, not only as a falsehood, but an impossibility: *Blaspheming that worthy name, by which we are called**; and disdaining to receive from God himself, any other rules, either of faith or life, than such as their own reason, directed by their own fancy, shall prescribe to them? And let us suppose, if we can, that the number of such as go these lengths deliberately, is upon the whole but small; yet what shall we say of the inconsiderately guilty? Are there not multitudes of all degrees, who seem never once to have asked themselves, whether they believe in God or not? or if they do, whether any regard is due to him or none? who slight religion boldly, without imagining they have ever examined it; who are persuaded of its truth, perhaps, so far as they have any persuasion about the matter, but have no notion that they are to regulate their conduct by it; who possibly do not quite approve of profane persons, but are astonished at pious ones; and by their indulgence to the former, and their very great proneness to despise the latter, plainly shew, whether they perceive it themselves or not, which party they are on the road to join?

We

* James ii. 7.

We have indeed many still who frequent divine worship: but how many of all ranks, and of that rank particularly, which ought to be an example, and will be one either of good or bad; how many that omit this duty entirely, or near it; and though it be an evident part of the law of nature, and an express precept of Christianity, can yet talk, not only of their own neglecting it, with much gaiety and humour, but of other persons attending upon it as matter of conscience, with much raillery? And such an ascendant hath this contemptuous kind of impiety got, that there are many persons, who sincerely honour their Maker in their hearts, but dare not, for fear of derision, shew it in their behaviour. Let it be thought of a little, what the appearance and construction of these things is: and let those who are qualified for it judge: Is not this the one nation upon earth, in which regard to God is taught in the greatest purity, and treated with the greatest contempt?

But a worse symptom yet, is, that whilst irreligious persons are active in the cause of infidelity, some of them with so self-denying a bigotry, as to teach it their servants, their very wives and children; the generality of such as think themselves very competently religious persons, scarce appear to have any practical impressions at all made on them by those truths, which they acknowledge for the law of their lives. They forget, it may be feared, almost totally, the exercise of private piety; and behave, in regard to public devotion, with a negligence, which they would think highly indecent towards their earthly superiors; allow themselves in such levity of speech, on the most serious subjects, as would scarce be justifiable in some of the most trifling ones; form their conduct avowedly on principles, that have no tincture in them of the faith which they profess; and in effect declare themselves to think of nothing but this world, whilst yet they are really persuaded of another to come. To this it must be added, that very many, who not only believe, but are influenced by their belief in other respects, instead of *confessing their Lord and Master before men*, as he hath most solemnly commanded them*, are silent and indifferent, whilst

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* Matth. x. 32. Mark viii. 38. Luke ix. 26.

he is denied or disregarded ever so much ; and seem ashamed of a cause they ought to glory in : by which means they give bad persons a colour for pretending, that few or none are Christians in earnest ; and take away from such as are well disposed, the encouragement of seeing how great a number yet remains. For, God be thanked, they are still no small number, who continue, after all, bearing testimony to the gospel of Christ. But of how many sins against it, not a few even of these are guilty, at the same time, by deviating from *the form of sound words* *, by unwarrantable divisions, and uncharitable animosities : it is a great deal better that they should consider, than that others should say : only thus much cannot but be said, that these things add a peculiar gloom to the view which we are taking.

Religion, it must be owned, hath never been practised anywhere as it ought. But have not both the practice and profession of it decayed, most remarkably, in this nation, within the compass of but a few years ? Is not the prospect before us, that of its declining yet much lower in the generation that is coming on ? and what do we imagine this will end in ? If God is, it must be a matter of ill desert, either wilfully or thoughtlessly to treat him as if he were not. If he hath given a revelation of his will to mankind, it cannot be innocent to neglect it, as if he had given none. And if he is the righteous Governor of the world, he will support his government by punishing where guilt appears. If the guilt be national, it must be expected the punishment will be so too. And though it were not, yet amidst the innumerable connections of things, one part of a society cannot suffer, but the whole must partake.

What judgments in particular God will execute at any time on impious nations, we cannot say. All nature is in his power : and they who offend, have every thing to fear. But one sure method of correction (a very merciful method, as the lower degrees of it give warning of the higher, but a dreadful one indeed, if that warning be not taken), is by appointing the natural consequences of every sin to be part of its reward. The consequences of irreligion then what are they,

* 2 Tim. i. 13.

they, and what must they be, on every community? True piety cannot induce men to injure their country; and comprehends peculiar inducements to serve it, of the greatest force. But in times of public danger especially, belief of religion gives a spirit, and defence of religion a motive for exerting it, which considerations of a lower nature will never equal. For what is there, that can equal the exhortation, *Be of good courage, and let us behave ourselves valiantly for our people and for the cities of our God: and let the Lord do that which is good in his sight* *. *Fear not, neither be dismayed: for the battle is not yours, but God's* †. Whereas, if some, through infidelity, have no hope in him, and others through wickedness have only fear of him, so far as these ways of thinking can influence, *all hands will be feeble, and every heart will melt* ‡.

But, indeed, the belief of a just and good being, who sees and will reward, is at all times the great support under the sufferings of life, the great incitement to every thing worthy, the great restraint from every thing base. Human weakness evidently wants these things; and there is nothing else that can always furnish them. The virtuous dictates of their own minds will have little influence comparatively on most men, when they are considered no longer as the voice of God speaking inwardly to them. And the penalties of human laws, without those of the divine law superadded, will often be evaded, and not seldom desperately braved. For if once men think there is nothing beyond death, they will soon come to think there is nothing in it, which ought to withhold them from preferring a short life spent as they like, to a long one spent otherwise. Feeling themselves free from the terrors of religion, they will fly out into profligateness, merely to shew they are free: And it will be encouragement enough to them, to pursue every appetite, passion, and fancy, without reserve; that whatever inconveniencies may happen to arise from it, one moment can deliver them from all at once, whenever they please. How then will they act in the numberless cases, to which the power of the magistrate either cannot or is not likely to reach at all, or but imperfectly at best? How, for instance,

* 1 Chron. xix. 13.

† 2 Chron. xx. 15.

‡ Isai. xlii. 7.

instance, will the properties and even the lives of men be secured, when perjury is no longer dreaded? A consideration of peculiar weight in this country; where, with amazing inconsistency, we are multiplying oaths, as if we could depend upon them for every thing; and slighting the care of religion, which alone can give us cause to depend on them for any thing. But in general, what or whom can we possibly hope mankind will regard to any constant good purpose, if they will not regard God: and how can we pretend to regard him, whilst we go on as we do? Nor let it be thought, that the belief of a future recompence is necessary to the lower part of the world alone; though if it were, they will never preserve it long, when they see their superiors have it not. But the higher mens station, and the greater their power is, the more is the importance, both to others and themselves, that they be strongly influenced to do good and not evil, by this only motive that can never be outweighed.

It is very true, neither irreligious persons are always so bad, nor religious ones always so good, as their notions lead them to be: But still every way of thinking produces, more or less, its natural effects. The deeper root religion takes, the more benefit will spring from it: and the wider irreligion spreads, the more mischief it will bring forth. At present, it must endeavour to appear as harmless as it can, to recommend itself; and some degree of the good old impressions will remain, and have influence for a time, even on those who have done their best to wear them out. But when profaneness shall once have attained its maturity, then it will be felt, if men are resolved not to see it before, which were in the right: the weak and credulous creatures, who contended for honouring God, or the persons of superior knowledge and freedom of thought, who scorned and forsook him.

But we must remember, our Maker is forsaken, when virtue, the law he hath given to mankind, is transgressed, as well as when his worship is deserted, or his being denied. Let it then be a second article of inquiry, what our condition is in this respect.

The consequence appears a very plain one, that when religion decays, morals must. However, let us look into fact. In speaking of virtues and vices relating to the public, no
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matters of controversy ought so much as to be hinted at in this place: a place to be kept sacredly separate from the contests of parties; and only employed, when occasion requires, to call on every party alike, as in the name of God, to consider their doings. Where divisions and mutual accusations run so dreadfully high, there must be great faults on one side or other; it is well, if not on all. And all should consider very seriously, what they are aiming at, and by what means; what they are risking, and to what good end. But that above the rest should be considered, which, it may be feared, is often thought of least, what must become, whilst each side is supporting itself by the methods too common, what must become of the virtue and integrity of this people, the most important part of all they have to be concerned for. Every other sort of loss nations have often recovered, and risen again from the lowest ebb; but loss of probity and principle, this affects the vitals of society; and whatever accidental advantages may seem to arise from it in any case for a time; if the distemper grows, and it is the hardest in the world to stop, its conclusion must be fatal. And let it not be objected, that countries of very little virtue and public spirit have flourished notwithstanding. For how have they flourished? In a state of freedom? No. Outward prosperity hath been joined with domestic oppression; or if intervals of ease have been felt, they have always been precarious, and generally short.

Impartial reflections on these matters will shew us very clearly the guilt and the danger of our sins, with respect to the public. But we shall see both in a yet stronger light, if we reflect farther, how very little zeal we express, in the midst of all our vehemence about disputed points, for the promotion of things indisputably right. Proposals for reformation are treated in the gross as mere chimeras; mighty little harm apprehended from the most flagrant immoralities, but dreadful ill consequences to liberty from restraining them: Laws treated with contempt by those who should obey them, and this connived at by those who should execute them; still every one complaining immoderately of others, for what no one will himself contribute to amend.

But, indeed, public virtue, though it were genuine, will never be consistent and universal, while private vices are indulged. And to what a deplorable degree these abound amongst us, needs not be said, how much soever it needs to be thought of. The intemperance, the promiscuous lewdness, the want of industry and frugality, the disregard to authority and order, the profligateness of all kinds, that hath overspread, in a most uncommon manner the lower part of the people, every body sees. And would but some of higher condition reflect, how much they have sunk themselves to a level with their inferiors, in some of the worst of their qualities; and indeed contributed to make many of them so bad as they are, and themselves despised by them at the same time; it might be hoped the consideration would be useful. But not to say more of these; the faults of too many, who are accounted, and are in comparison, decent and regular persons; their improvident expensiveness, pernicious many ways; their living to amusements and pleasures only, and overlooking the most serious obligations of life; forgetting the inspection of their own conduct, their families and affairs; neglecting their very children, at least in the important point of their religion and morals: These are sad instances of personal guilt, and make a great addition to the national danger.

But when, to the abovementioned epidemical sins, every one hath added, after examining himself faithfully, the separate transgressions of his own life, and the inward *plague*, which he hath permitted to infect *his own heart**; unknown perhaps to men, but *naked and open to Him, with whom we have to do*†: then we shall have no doubt left, whether the total amount be not abundantly sufficient to justify heaven, in whatever judgments it may inflict on us and our country. And if, for instance, by our contempt of true religion, we should open a way for Popish superstition to overspread us, after a short preparatory reign of atheistical dissoluteness; if our abuses on all hands of the blessings of a free government should introduce upon us a slavery of our own creating; if the sinful excesses, that we have suffered wealth and plenty to lead us into, should bring on us, as they naturally do, poverty and distress; and our domestic

enmities

* 1 Kings viii. 32.

† Heb. iv. 13.

enmities deliver us up to our common adversary : *who shall have pity upon thee, O Jerusalem, or who shall bemoan thee ; or who shall go aside to ask of thy peace * ?*

The common answer to all representations of this sort is, that the world hath always been bad ; and therefore we have no peculiar reason to fear. But if it hath been always a place of wickedness, it hath always been a place of misery too, by means of that wickedness. Continual efforts have been ever necessary to keep both from increasing. And if we, whom God hath treated with such distinguishing mercy, will not use these efforts, but abandon ourselves to sin ; as he doth think fit to make some examples of his justice from time to time, what fitter example he can make, is hard to say.

Persons, however, will flatter themselves, that these, at the worst, are dangers of very distant times. And every single sinner in the world flatters himself in just the same manner. Yet the consequences of their sins do overtake men, and may overtake nations too, with surprising suddenness. And the sentence, recorded in scripture, is perfectly just : *They of the house of Israel say, the vision that he seeth is for many days to come ; and he prophesieth of times that are far off. Therefore shall none of my words be prolonged any more ; but the word which I have spoken shall be done, saith the Lord God †. And they shall know, that I am the Lord ; and have not said in vain, that I would do this evil unto them ‡.*

Other persons there are, who acknowledge the prospect to be bad, and evil perhaps impending : But the only wise part in their opinion is, to let matters go as they will, and enjoy themselves as long as they can : Why should they be uneasy before the time comes ? Now, if it were certain, that nothing could do good, this might be reasonable in a worldly view of things ; but where every one may contribute, both by amending himself and awaking others, to prevent ruin ; there to be indolent, is as contrary to humanity, as it is to religion. And therefore the word of God hath taken severe notice of it, as a great crime. *Ye have seen the breaches of the city of David, that they are many :—And in that day did the Lord God of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to girding with*

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sackcloth ;

* Jer. xv. 5.

† Ezek. xlii. 27. 28.

‡ Ezek. vi. 10.

*sackcloth ; and behold joy and gladness, eating flesh and drinking wine : Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die. And it was revealed in mine ears by the Lord of hosts : Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die, saith the Lord God of hosts **.

But even they, who are concerned for the public, may yet express that concern in a very faulty way. Many seem to think they have fully done their duty, as soon as they have been angry at those, whom they apprehend to have any way occasioned what is amiss : angry, perhaps at the wrong persons, perhaps in a wrong manner ; such as only tends to increase guilt, and hasten mischief.

The first complaint, generally speaking, is of those in authority. And undoubtedly the people have a right to complain, whenever, the common concern is administered ill. But then it should be considered, that we may, through ignorance or prejudice, expect from authority, either what it cannot do, or what is not fit to be done ; we may expect more than is reasonable to expect from men like ourselves, though it be fit ; and even supposing them very much to blame, we may conduct ourselves upon it so as to be equally or yet more to blame. Want of reverence to laws and superiors is one of our great evils ; and all opposition to whatever is thought wrong, should be accompanied with the strictest care not to augment this evil. But our duty requires us peculiarly to beware of raising domestic uneasinesses too high, when a foreign enemy may take advantage of them : and at all times it requires us to preserve most religiously the loyalty and honour due to the supreme power ; especially now, when our present establishment is our only human hope of having all that is valuable to us secured to ourselves, and transmitted to our posterity.

Next to the rulers of a nation, its instructors are usually the great object of censure ; and we acknowledge there is cause. We have not been so serious and religious, so zealous and diligent, so disinterested and humble, so mild and charitable, as we ought. The public must have suffered by this ; we have suffered by it ourselves ; and, unless we repent, we
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* Isa. xxii. 9, 12, 13, 14.

ground to expect a yet fuller execution, than we have experienced already, of what heaven inflicted on our predecessors in the Jewish nation: *Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept my ways* *. Yet we cannot but hope, that a very considerable part of the accusations brought against us, would appear, upon inquiry, to be without foundation. But however that be, we must remind you, that our faults will be no excuse for your transgressions; and we earnestly beg, that they who complain we do not the good we ought, would at least not hinder, but give us opportunity, and assist us rather to do both others and themselves the good we would.

But even they, who proceed from complaints to endeavours of amending things, will fail unhappily of their end, if they trust to worldly methods alone, and leave religion and virtue, the great support and cement of human society, out of their schemes. This will be merely palliating for a little while; and doing what the scripture, in perfect conformity with plain reason, hath long ago condemned, as doing nothing. *Because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace, and there was no peace; and one built up a wall, and others daubed it with untempered mortar: Therefore, thus saith the Lord God, I will rend it with a stormy wind, and bring it down to the ground, so that the foundations thereof shall be discovered; and it shall fall, and ye shall be consumed in the midst thereof, and ye shall know that I am the Lord* †. Indeed, every page of the prophetic writings recommends itself greatly to thinking persons, by the most forcible and convincing expressions of the utter inefficacy of every expedient for public good, that is not accompanied with true virtue and true piety.

These, therefore, it is our most important interest to restore and promote; to represent with earnestness, and yet with mildness, to such as are deficient in either, how wrong in itself, and how hurtful to the world, their conduct is; and to be zealous in doing our own duty, whether they will attend to theirs or not; persons of rank and influence, by setting an example worthy of imitation, and showing different regards to the good and the bad; persons intrusted with public power,

* Mal. ii. 9.

† Ezek. xiii. 10-14.

by behaving in their several stations uprightly ; parents and masters, by the prudent exercise of their private authority ; and every one, at least, by reforming himself. This, if it do nothing farther, will be securing his own happiness ; and the more single reformati^ons there are, the nearer will be our approach to an universal one. We are called indeed perpetually to repentance ; but the present national call, if it be not hearkened to, will much aggravate the guilt, not only of the profane despisers of it, but those also, whose compliance with it is merely external ; who dare to approach the Searcher of hearts, and mock him by saying to him, without sincerity, such things as we have joined in saying this day.

On the times appointed for confession of sins, it hath always been a rule, as the word of God plainly shews, for persons to abstain in a considerable degree from their usual food : not as thinking it a duty of any value in itself, for that were a superstitious imagination ; and nothing can be more express against every superstition, than scripture is ; but partly to make an acknowledgment of more than ordinary solemnity, by their actions as well as words, of their unworthiness to partake of the common blessings of heaven ; and chiefly to spend those hours in humility of spirit, and cool reflection for their future good, which they have spent too frequently in dangerous levities, or sinful indulgences. It is not then the abstinence, it is not the outward humiliation, nor even the real seriousness of a day, which God requires of us ; but that these things be made subservient to our lasting benefit : that preserving on our minds the impressi^on of what we have said and heard here, we go home and retire into ourselves ; think over our several duties, public and private, with respect to our Maker, our fellow-creatures, and the regulation of our own hearts ; and after renewing our applications for pardon and grace, set right, without delay, whatever hath been wrong ; that we form resolutions to think often of our conduct, to follow steadily the most effectual methods for preserving it such as we ought, and not to suffer the opinions and customs of an inconsiderate world, to wear out of our minds the regard we owe to the author and end of our beings.

But besides these obligations, there is yet another, which particularly deserves our attention at this time ; that when

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we ask mercy of God, we shew it to man. And accordingly the scripture joins closely together fasting and giving alms; which therefore we should join too, each according to his ability; but always remembering, that no one part of our duty whatever will be accepted as an equivalent for transgressing any other; but we must *break off our sins by righteousness*, as well as *our iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor**, if ever we expect that our charity should avail towards procuring our pardon.

And now would we but employ the present solemnity, in determining conscientiously to practise these things; besides the good fruits, it could not fail to produce in each of us singly; we might hope, on very just grounds, to experience nationally the same happy effects of it, which we read the *Jews* did, from making the same determination, upon hearing the admonition of the text. *They gathered themselves together, and they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers. And they sware unto him with a loud voice: And all Judah rejoiced at the oath. For they had sworn with all their heart, and sought him with their whole desire, and he was found of them: And the Lord gave them rest round about*†.

* Dan. iv. 27.

† 2 Chron. xv. 10, 12, 14, 15.

S E R M O N CXVIII.

(Preached on a General Fast.)

THE DUTY OF HUMILITY AT ALL TIMES, MORE ESPECIALLY
ON OCCASIONS OF NATIONAL DISTRESS.

I PET. v. 6.

*Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God,
that he may exalt you in due time.*

HUMILITY of heart and behaviour is a duty, so deeply founded in the nature of man, that though we knew of no power above us, we ought yet to think modestly of ourselves, from a consciousness of our infirmities; and pay a mutual deference one to another, in proportion to the different pre-eminences, be they ever so small, by which we are severally distinguished. But the least apprehension of a perfect being superintending us, must surely magnify beyond expression the sense, how very imperfect we are; and convince us, that the utmost reverence, of which we are capable, towards such a one, if such a one there be, will fall vastly short of what we owe. Now the existence of a powerful and wise, a just and good, ruler of all, is, at first sight, a possible thing. And were we sure of no more, the notion is so respectable in itself, so beneficial to human society, and so peculiarly comfortable to every honest mind, that passing it over with a scornful neglect, instead of attending to it seriously, would be haughtiness of spirit, blameworthy and shocking to a great degree. But the reality of this notion is undeniably proved, by the plainest observations on every part of the universe, and the strictest inquiries into its general constitution; by the natural prepossessions of common men, the acutest reasonings of speculative men,

men, and the most universal consent that ever any invisible truth obtained of all men. Yet farther, to leave no plea for ignorance of it or its consequences, the Creator hath made himself known to his creatures by express revelation; and declared what he is, what he expects from them, what he hath decreed concerning them. How monstrous a disposition of soul must it be then, that can pride itself in standing out against such evidence of such a doctrine; can take upon it to censure the works of the Almighty, without understanding a single part of them thoroughly; can triumph in the thought of an ungoverned and fatherless world, of wickedness unpunished, and virtue unrewarded, and hold those in utter contempt who entertain better hopes!

Our nation affords, I fear, more than a few persons guilty even of such pride against God as this. But it affords multitudes of a sort, if possible, yet more unaccountable, who believe in him, and slight him. Acknowledging a Sovereign Lord of the world, without standing in awe of him, is doubtless a most astonishing inconsistency; and yet I conceive it will appear, on inquiry, the main source of those great and many sins for which we are met here to express our concern. Now, if this be our case, a little reflection will shew it to be a very dangerous one: and the apostle hath pointed out the only cure, that since, as the preceding verse teaches, *God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble*, we should *humble ourselves* unfeignedly *under his mighty hand*, which hath been, and is, in several respects, heavy on us; that so, instead of depressing us lower still, *he may exalt us again in due time*.

There are not many comparatively, but, in their cooler hours at least, believe the Author of Nature to be also the wise and just Lawgiver and Ruler of mankind. Nay, lamentable as the apostacy of our days hath been, the generality still entertain a persuasion, grounded on the firmest proofs, that he hath notified the conditions of eternal felicity by Jesus Christ. But, having this *knowledge of God*, do they *glorify him as God**? Do they pay any homage to him? Do they cultivate any regard for him? Do they consider him as the
Giver

* Rom. i. 21

Giver of all Good, to whom their thanks are due for every thing they enjoy ; as the Judge of the whole earth, who shall reward every one according to his works ? Will they, in obedience to that reason which he hath bestowed on them, resist their vicious appetites and passions ? Will they, on the authority of that revelation which he hath superadded, receive any thing, but what they can see of themselves to be true ; or do any thing, but what they can see of themselves to be requisite ? Is it not indeed their stated practice to set their own inclinations and fancies above all his assertions and laws ; disdaining to mind what is right or wrong, even when it relates to this life ; and much more to be swayed by the tendencies, which doctrines or precepts may have, to fit them for the happiness of another ?

Nay, such as imagine themselves perhaps very steady believers, and sufficiently good Christians, do not many of them, though less professedly, and without distinctly seeing it, yet almost as effectually, make their choice, just as they like, in what things their Christianity shall consist ; and what they will go on to think or practise, however plainly forbidden in any one's judgment but their own. Are they at all willing to seek, with serious humility, what the gospel teaches ? Are they withheld from any sin which it forbids, merely by the fear of their Lord and Master ? Do they perform any duty which it enjoins, merely from love to their Redeemer ? Try them but in one point. The sacred writings have repeatedly directed a regular attendance on public worship and instruction : yet they neglect it perpetually, on pretences for which they would neglect scarce any one thing besides : when they condescend to come, they would usually be understood to do it as matter of prudence, or propriety, and compliance with custom, but by no means of obedience to God. And, in general, they substitute the fashions and usages of what they call the world, that is, of the persons with whom they desire to please, in the place of the divine commands. This wretched rule they follow against their consciences first ; to this, by degrees, they bend their consciences afterwards ; and when once they have accomplished that, they will not reflect, they will not hearken, they will not bear the mention of an argument or hint to the contrary, but exclaim against it as ab-

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furd, before it can well be brought out, let reason or scripture say what they will; till at last, not even yet renouncing their faith, they have hardly a single good impression from it left; no gratitude to God, no hope in him, no dread of him; no thought of themselves in earnest as his creatures; nor any recollection how profligate a treatment this is of our Maker, our Saviour, of the Holy Spirit of grace. We do not know, I believe, nor suspect very often, how inconsiderable God is become in our eyes, and how near advances we have made to what is, in effect, mere atheism. But we have cheated ourselves with disguises, and shifted between religion and irreligion, till we have no perception whereabouts we are. And it is high time for us to fix, once for all, which we will stand to. For if the Almighty deserves any regard, he deserves a most dutiful and universal one. Will we therefore pay him that, or will we avow paying him none?

But were many of us, whose appearance is more decent, to be examined, what there is in us beyond appearance; were many, who have some inward restraints and pious feelings, questioned how far they extend, and if there be not mixed with them a much less indeed, but still a very criminal neglect and contempt of the Supreme Being, what do they think the result would be? Were such to be asked, how often they pray to him in private, or whether they remember perhaps when they did so last; with what attention they pray at such times, or whether hurrying over a set of unmeaning words contents them; what care they take in his house, that their hearts join in the things they say, or improve by those they hear; how often they meditate, as in the presence of God, on their duty, and their condition with regard to another life; whether in truth they almost ever think of a future state, as their principal concern, or have not inwardly chosen their portion here; whether they indulge no secret immorality, are chargerble with no injustice or unmercifulness; what expression, or what tincture, there is in their common conversation and behaviour of a Christian spirit; what zeal they have, what expences they are at, what methods they encourage, what pains they take for promoting the present and eternal welfare of their fellow-creatures; how must they answer? Nobody hath a right, it may be, to put such questions

to you ; but surely they are very important for you to put to yourselves. And for God's sake do it ; and press your souls home to make an honest reply. For if religion be any thing, these are most material things. Do you then find, that you have hitherto been, in relation to them, such persons as you ought ? And if not, do you experience a proportionable concern for your failures ? Are you even now resolved to become such ? And will you remember and keep to what you resolve ; or run away from your convictions to the first employment or amusement you can hope to lose them in, or however suffer them to wear out for want of being renewed ; so, after a while, neglect your Maker and his laws as much as ever ; and possibly despise yourselves for having once, in a sort of fright, thought to do otherwise ? If you relapse so far, your case will be a very dangerous, God grant it be not a desperate one.

Yet amongst all these blameable sorts of persons, there are many perhaps not ill disposed, were they left to follow their own judgments quietly, towards becoming sincerely and throughout religious : but the world would wonder at them, their acquaintance would ridicule them ; and that they cannot bear. But which is your God then ? The world, or the Maker of it ? And which is it fitter you should humble yourselves under ? The rightful authority of the greatest and best of Beings, or the usurped tyranny of a few vain mortals, whose friendship means you no good, and whose enmity can do you no harm ? But so it is : we are cowardly one to another, and brave only against *him who hath power to cast into hell* *.

Even the lowest part of mankind, they also now have learnt from their superiors to lift themselves up in defiance of the Most High ; to plead openly and boldly for gratifications, expressly prohibited by his commandments ; to prefer their diversions or their idleness before his worship ; some of them to *sit in*, and others to surround *the seat of the scorner* †. For poor wretches that know nothing else, imagine they know enough, however, to be above instruction in their duty, to condemn God's word, and scoff at his ministers.

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* Luke xii. 5.

† Psal. i. 1.

Such is the condition, and I appeal to the observation of you all, alas ! to the consciences of too many of you, if it be not daily more and more, if it be not, I had almost said, universally, the condition of the people of this land, especially this city. *Help, Lord ; for the godly man ceaseth, for the faithful fail from among the children of men**.

But how great and general soever our transgressions have been, it will be alleged, that they cannot have arisen from a principle so very shocking as pride, directed against the Author of our Beings, but from inconsiderate indulgence of less heinous, though still blame-worthy dispositions. But were there, and O that there were ! much more room for this plea than there is, yet bare inconsiderateness and forgetfulness of God is, in no small degree, contempt of him. However, some offenders have not adventured on so direct impiety as others. And we ought to judge, with all possible tenderness, of every one's case besides our own ; but it concerns us, beyond expression, not to flatter ourselves in that. And we may discern, with certainty, the true state of it by this one mark. If want of thought hath occasioned ill behaviour, we shall be thankful for admonition, and readily change our course ; if pride, we shall be displeased with it, and tempted to go on. But whether we have disobeyed God wilfully or inadvertently, we have great cause to humble ourselves before him with deep contrition, and bewail our own personal guilt in the first place, then the sins of those who make up the same community with us ; for he cannot correct them, but we must suffer at the same time.

Now, supposing we did not at all feel ourselves particularly under his mighty hand at present, yet surely we ought to recollect with great awe, that in reality we are under it always. His government of the world is without ceasing carried on, however silently, yet steadily and powerfully, to that one end, which a Being of perfect holiness must propose to himself ultimately, the manifestation of his glory, in the punishment of the wicked, and reward of the good. Were both to be entirely deferred till after death, as the chief part of both will, yet how near is that to us all ; and how very near

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* Psal. xiii. 1.

to many of us, who perhaps are the farthest of any from suspecting it ! Though, were it as distant as it can, yet the connection of it with eternal enjoyments or sufferings being as certain as that God is holy and true, the practical inference would be just the same as if it were overtaking us this very moment. But indeed, unless we will absolutely shut our eyes, we must see judgments from above, both naturally flowing from our sins, and additionally inflicted on them in the mean while.

All wickedness, by the righteous and wise appointment of Providence, in the ordinary course of things, produces misery : and the great restraint from all wickedness is the fear of God. While men continue to reverence him, there will always be some hold upon them, to keep them back from committing evil, or bring them back to repent of it. But when once that band is broken, which it is of late in this nation, beyond any other in the Christian, or perhaps the Heathen world, slighter and weaker ties will soon give way one after another, till by degrees every thing is set loose. And how very fast accordingly our morals and our prudence have been forsaking us, ever since we have begun to forsake religion, and to find out that our Maker is unworthy of our notice, a little reflection will shew us too plainly, if indeed any be needful. Do we not see probity and integrity, friendliness and natural affection, visibly decayed ? Persons of all ranks living above their ranks ; and first distressing themselves and their families by vain and vicious expences, then descending to every baseness that will enable them to proceed in this wrong way, and every folly that will drive away remorse for an hour, though by furnishing cause for its return with more bitterness than ever ; crowding their whole time with absurd and dangerous diversions, and infected with a rage for pleasure and shew, be the consequences what they will ; that hath taken possession of high and low, young and old, to a degree unknown before ; and in many fears not, in some affects, to display itself, on the days set apart for the worship of God, nay for solemn penitence and humiliation ? Do we not see almost every body treating the grossest and most pernicious immoralities, of what they gently stile the gay kind, as no faults at all in one sex, and daily approaching nearer towards as-

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fording them open countenance in the other : making, on any occasion indeed, very little distinction, though it be of unspeakable importance to make a great one, between good people and bad ; or, to say the truth, rather inverting than laying claim to the psalmist's character : *In whose eyes a vile person is contemned ; but he honoureth them, that fear the Lord* *. Do we not see them educating their children, and managing their servants, as if it were on purpose to have them wicked ; plainly perceiving them to be miserable in consequence of it ; perpetually involved themselves in grievous uneasinesses and difficulties from it, and making frequently heavy complaints of it ; yet never once reflecting to purpose, whence it comes, or what would mend it ; but stupidly acquiescing in what they have the nearest concern to prevent ; and taking it for granted, that such of necessity is to be the condition of their families, from one generation to another ?

And if these fruits have sprung in private life from our disdain of piety, what must it have produced in public ? Just what we were to expect from a number of such creatures put together ; and from the fixed decree of providence, that *they, who plough iniquity, and sow wickedness, shall reap the same* †. Rulers and magistrates, having permitted the authority that ordained them to sink, have, by a consequence which they might easily have foreseen, lost their own : Respect to every kind of superiors is worn out ; and next to the laws of heaven, those of our country are regarded least. The nature of things, and the word of God, have made uprightness and industry the supports of society, and religion the support of them. But we have imagined we could do better than this : we have been laying other foundations, and bringing these into utter disesteem, as it were by consent on all sides, till they, who desire most to act upon principle, find, it may be feared, scarce any remainder of principle among us left to act upon. We have *trusted in the staff of a broken reed, whereon if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it* ‡. We have *forsaken God, the fountain of living waters, and hewed us out broken cisterns, that can hold no water* §. We have indeed been worse

* Ps. xv. 4.

† Is. xxxvi. 6.

‡ Job iv. 8.

§ Jer. ii. 13.

worse than negligent, we have been jealous of religion; fearful that bigotry, enthusiasm, superstition, and all manner of evils would flow from it; and so, without taking the least care to guard against them, or prevent the increase of that communion, in which they are most intimately mixed with it, piety in general hath been made the subject of invective and derision, till we are at present immersed in profaneness and profligateness: and, as extremes beget one another, directly in the road to be over-run after a while by Popery, the schools of which are multiplying continually in our streets. We have thought the morals of our people totally undeserving of regard, unless it were to corrupt them, that we might enjoy *the public benefits of private vices*: and the consequence hath been, to say of others no more than hath been said, that our poor, the strength and riches of a nation when regulated well, ate every-where destroying themselves and their posterity by their intemperance and promiscuous lewdness; and becoming, in the mean time, an insupportable burthen by their idleness and extravagance. We have thought that neither God nor man were to restrain whatever we please to call liberty; and thus we have plunged into a licentiousness, that hath brought upon us many of the inconveniencies, and almost all the discontent, of slavery.

Nor hath the Almighty omitted to superadd, though with a gentle hand, corrections entirely his own, to the sufferings, which we have chosen to inflict on ourselves, by means of the stated connections, which he hath wisely and justly established. We had long been possessed of the blessing of peace, without making any one good use of it; and he hath permitted a war to come upon us, of which we foresee neither the duration nor the event. We had long enjoyed healthy and plentiful seasons, without acknowledging Him for the giver of them: and we have since been visited with sickness in all our borders; and such dearth as few, if any of us, ever knew before. *Our heavens have been made as brass, and our earth as iron**; and we would not understand it to be a chastisement: *the former and the latter rain*† have been restored to us, and we have not owned it to be a mercy. Now, if lighter and shorter judgments

* Deut. xxviii. 23.

† Deut. xi. 14. Jer. v. 24.

ments will not awaken us, heavier and longer must. For so the prophet foretells: *Lord, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see; but they shall see* *. And how much greater evils God may yet cause us to see, lies hid in the treasures of his own foreknowledge. We are at present in a condition, that may, in various respects, very naturally and very soon become extremely dreadful. And what else we can do to better our prospect, is neither easy for any person to discover, nor indeed the concern of every person to inquire; but there is one thing, which alone of itself will do incredible good; and every thing besides, very little without it; which we all have in our power, and all feel to be our duty. *Come, and let us return unto the Lord our God; for he hath torn, and he will heal us: He hath smitten, and he will bind us up* †.

Both particulars and nations, which fall into a bad way, are strangely unwilling, for the most part, to understand the truth of their own case. Such was the disposition of God's ancient people, admirably described by the prophet *Hosea*: *His strength is devoured, and he knoweth it not: yea, grey hairs are upon him, and he knoweth it not. And the pride of Israel testifieth to his face: and they do not return to the Lord, nor seek him, for all this* ‡. Nay, when the disease is much too notorious to be denied, persons will be ascribing it to other causes, and inventing other cures, than the right one; putting confidence in schemes unconnected with reformation, and perhaps mending bad with worse. But to these the Almighty himself hath expressly denounced: *Woe to the rebellious children, saith the Lord, that take counsel, but not of me; that cover with a covering, but not of my spirit; that they may add sin to sin: that will not hear the law of the Lord; which say, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us. Wherefore, thus saith the Holy One of Israel, Because ye despise this word, therefore this iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fall, swelling out in a high wall, whose breaking cometh suddenly at an instant* §. Healing fores in a palliative unsound manner, only occasions their bursting out again with

* II. xxvi. 11.

† Hof. vii. 9, 10.

‡ Hof. vi. 1.

§ II. xxx. 1—13.

with more threatening symptoms. If therefore we would truly mend our case, we must go to the bottom of it. We have been wicked, and we must repent. We have despised God, and we must *humble ourselves under his mighty hand*.

But then what shall we reckon is doing so? Is it merely appointing or observing a form of humiliation for form's sake? Instead of appeasing God, we shall not so much as deceive men by this; but only veil irreligion with transparent hypocrisy. Is it then being affected and warmed a little, at the time, by what we say or hear in this place, and becoming, almost immediately after, just the same persons that we were before! On the contrary, these transient fits of piety are mentioned in scripture, as a very discouraging sign: *O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? For your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away**. While persons reflect not at all, one knows not how it may operate, if ever they come to reflect. But when, through the grace of God, they have actually been made sensible of their guilt and their danger, and yet relapse into it; when their convictions have been renewed, their good purposes repeated, and yet all suffered, time after time, to fall back into nothing, what can be expected, but that heaven will at last abandon those, who, in so shameful a manner, abandon themselves? Our present business therefore is, each of us to imprint on our minds now such deep sentiments, as may influence us ever after, that devoutly conforming our lives and our souls to the will of God, is the very end of our being: to recollect and confess before him, how grievously and how long both we in particular, and this nation in general, have neglected the obedience we owe him: to acknowledge, that we are altogether in his hands, as private persons and as a people: to consider whatever hath befallen us, as less than our iniquities have merited: to prepare ourselves, with meek resignation, for whatever more he may please to inflict on us: yet earnestly petition him, that whatever becomes of our temporal concerns, *our spirits may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus†*; and that if it be consistent

* Hos. vi. 4.

† 1 Cor. v. 5.

ent with his holiness and wisdom, he would spare us even in this world, *not for our righteousness, but his own great mercies**, in Christ our Redeemer, for the honour of his name, and the preservation of his true religion established amongst us; to form solemn resolutions against every sin, against every occasion of sin, for the future: begging at the same time that grace of our Sanctifier, which alone can make them effectual; and do all these things not only in profession, as matter of outward decency, but from the bottom of our souls; not only with a sudden fervor, excited here in the congregation, but deliberately at home, before *our Father which seeth in secret*†.

How easy, or how hard, it may be for any of us to bring our hearts really into such a frame as this, he only knows, who knows all things. Perhaps it is a sort of language, and a way of thinking, to which some of us have never been used, and which others have long disused. If it be, we have so much the more need to take it up without delay. For our Maker and our Judge is entitled to the most lowly submissions from his guilty creatures; and there is neither any meanness in making, nor any greatness in refusing, them. In all cases, the just and the right is the worthy and the honourable behaviour. But in this, above all, it is the necessary one too. Obstinacy cannot support us; dissimulation will not conceal us; it is God we are concerned with, and our only resource is to throw ourselves on his mercy. The very best of us have cause to lament our failings, to reiterate our vows, to implore his forgiveness and assistance, yet more ardently than we have done. In proportion to our transgressions and deficiencies, our self-abasement, our penitence, our supplications, our efforts of amendment, ought to increase. And that our performance of these obligations will be followed, bad as our state is, with the happiest consequences, reason affords comfortable hope, the whole tenor of scripture expressly declares, and the text with peculiar strength implies, *humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.*

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* Dan. ix. 18.

† Matth. vi. 6.

But I must not now enter on the illustration and proof of this important connection. May our present humiliation give an experimental proof of it, by effectually inclining us to *be reconciled to God**, and inducing him to direct our public counsels into the way of national prosperity, and our private conduct into that of eternal blessedness.

* 2 Cor. v. 20.

SER-

S E R M O N CXIX.

(Preached on a General Fast.)

THE DUTY OF HUMILITY AT ALL TIMES, MORE ESPECIALLY
ON OCCASIONS OF NATIONAL DISTRESS.

I PET. v. 6.

*Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God,
that he may exalt you in due time.*

AT our last meeting on the same most necessary occasion which calls us together now, I endeavoured to lay before you, from these words, both the general duty of man's *walking humbly with his God**, and the particular reasons, which we of this nation have, for exercising a very deep humility towards him, as we have been particularly guilty, besides various other sins, of that unspeakable shocking one, pride against him. Too many amongst us have dared to treat the faith, if not of his being, yet of the only thing which makes it valuable, a just and good providence, with utter contempt; absurd as it is, that the wise and powerful Maker of the world should not be the Ruler of it, and that the Ruler of the world should not *reward every one according to his works*†. Much greater numbers, if they do not deny his moral government, yet almost entirely disregard it; attend on his public worship but seldom, and then visibly as matter of mere external decency; never condescend to pay him any homage in private; nor through their whole behaviour consider him, in the least, as what they profess to acknowledge he is, the Lawgiver, the Inspector and Judge of their lives

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* Mic. vi. 8.

† Matth. xvi. 27.

and hearts ; but securely follow passion, appetite, custom, fancy, as the guide of their conduct ; and openly ridicule those that do otherwise ; call themselves Christians perhaps ; but are totally void of reverence for every doctrine of Christianity that is above their comprehension, for every precept that contradicts their inclination, and strangely negligent even of natural piety and social virtue. Larger multitudes yet imagine, that they are mighty religious persons, if they preserve but a tolerable regularity in the outward acts of devotion, justice and temperance, though not proceeding from any inward principle of love and duty to God ; not accompanied by any sense of their needing his pardon through the blessed Jesus, or his help through the influences of the Holy Spirit ; not carried on to an uniform habit either of obedience or resignation, or animated by the hopes of a better world. Indeed they most commonly live, and often die, as unconcerned about his future disposal of them, as if it were not a matter of moment at all, instead of being the only real one that belongs to our condition.

But, if possible, we have slighted him still more, considered as a people, than separately. We have enjoyed the greatest national blessings, without the least national thankfulness for them. In particular, he hath blessed us with the clearest knowledge of the several obligations incumbent on us ; and we have shewn the most absolute scorn of all methods for promoting or securing the practice of them, even in those points on which our public welfare most confessedly depends. Nor have we hitherto received the warnings, or even the corrections of the Almighty, which have begun to overtake us, with more respect than his mercies. You have just heard the case of the barren fig-tree read in the gospel for the day : *Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit, and find none : cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground* * ? Brethren, what is our case ? The present is the fifth year that we have professed to observe a solemn fast, on account of our sins and our dangers, without making the least reformation in any single article. Nay, we have continually increased in neglect of religion, in gaiety and madness for pleasure, till we are come

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* Luke xiii. 7.

to pursue our diversions openly on the most sacred day of the week ; and some (for in every instance, while the offence is renewed, the complaint must) cannot persuade themselves to abstain from them, or from inviting large companies of others to join in them, even on these anniversaries of peculiar humiliation.

Such outrages on piety and common decency as these, must, when repeated after notice taken of them, and warning given against them, which hath been faithfully done by the ministers of God's word, be deemed premeditated insults, not inadvertence and forgetfulness. Yet forgetfulness of the Most High can never be a slight offence : and is greatly aggravated by the strong admonitions to remember him, which not only his holy word and our consciences, would we hearken to them, give us perpetually, but his providence also hath given us of late. The natural consequences and superadded punishments of our disregard to him, have appeared very plainly for some time, and are daily becoming more visible and sensible, in the sins, and follies, and distresses of private life, in the general want of public order and public spirit in burdens and uneasinesses ; in threatnings and actual attempts from abroad to deprive us of the liberty we have abused, and the religion we have scorned ; and sink us down into the slavery, and superstition, and wretchedness, that we have deserved to feel. Hitherto, indeed, the storm hath not fallen upon us ; but it still hangs over us more heavily than most of us have ever known : our efforts to dispel it have succeeded very imperfectly ; the difficulty of renewing those efforts must be augmenting each year ; our enemies are multiplied in a dreadful manner ; and what assistance we may expect from our friends, God only knows. One thing, indeed, may afford some consolation to us. We have manifested, on occasion of our danger, an universal zeal for that establishment which is the only human means of preserving us from it. Had we failed in our loyalty, we had completed our wickedness : and should any temptation hereafter entice or provoke us to fail in it, we and our posterity are entirely undone. But there can be no sure dependence on their dutifulness to their king, who are undutiful to their God ; or on their attachment to the common interest of the society, who prefer every present gratification

gratification to their own everlasting welfare. Or if there could, a profane and wicked people will never have equal spirit in defence of the community, for they have not equal motives to it, with a pious and virtuous one. Or supposing their courage ever so great; their wealth, their strength, their union, their assiduity, their observance of rules, their mutual confidence, will be less; and those vices, which have brought us already so far on our way towards ruin, must at length, if we persist in them, bring us to it, merely by producing their natural effects.

But could we have hopes of escaping these, the honour of the divine government is concerned not to let a national contempt of it go unpunished, even in this world; and all reliance on human wisdom and power, without regard to God, will prove in the end fatal self-deceit. *When the Lord shall stretch out his hand, both he that helpeth shall stumble, and he that is holpen shall fall down: they shall all fail together*.* *The anger of the Lord shall not return, till he have performed the thoughts of his heart: in the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly†.*

But surely then we had much better consider it *in this our day‡*: and, as another text awfully exhorts, *give glory to the Lord our God, before he cause darkness; and while we look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death§*. Too many, of all ranks, will probably slight whatever of this kind is said, even from scripture itself. But still our commission is: *Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel; to a rebellious nation, that hath rebelled against me, they and their fathers unto this very day: and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord; and thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear||*. Men in power and high stations more especially, and they who aspire to them no less, have always been disposed to look with great disdain on the artless and unwelcome directions, which religion suggests for deliverance from danger. They have more refined contrivances, on which they rest; and scorn the plain methods of reconciliation to God, and trust in him, through our blessed Redeemer,

* Isa. xxxi. 3.

§ Jer. xlii. 16.

† Jer. xxiii. 20

|| Ezek. ii. 3, 4, 7.

‡ Luke xix. 42.

Redeemer, as fitted only for the populace to hearken to. But the scripture hath provided an alarming denunciation against them in particular. *Hear the word of the Lord, ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem. Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement: when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us; for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves: Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste*. Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet; and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place. And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand. Now therefore be ye not mockers, lest your bands be made strong†. Another sort of persons, extremely apt to despise the thought of reformation, indeed all serious thought whatever, are they who abandon themselves to indolence and voluptuousness, and the study of luxurious elegance and delicacy. But for these likewise, there is, in the treasury of the prophets, a menace in store, which contains, alas! much too exact a description of our own times. *Woe unto them, that are at ease in Zion, that put far away the evil day, that lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, that eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall (the luxury of the table had then made but a small progress), that chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music, that drink wine in bowls, and perfume themselves with the chief perfumes‡, but are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. Therefore now shall they go captive with the first that go captive, and their banquet shall be removed§. Others again are by no means indifferent about the storm which they see gathering; but have no belief, that amendment, or any thing, can disperse it; and therefore will*
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* Or, be ashamed. See Rom. ix. 33. x. 11. † Isa. xxviii. 14—18, 22.

‡ In our translation it is, anoint themselves with the chief ointments. But this, though literal, gives a different idea now from what it did then.

§ Amos vi. 1, 3—7.

take no pains in what they conceive will produce no good. But at least to themselves amendment will produce the greatest good: and resolutions not to amend, will bring, both upon them and others, more certain and speedy, and total destruction; which else, after all, may perhaps be avoided. For hear the declaration of God in this case. *Now therefore speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying: Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I frame evil against you; return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good. And they said, There is no hope; but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart. Therefore thus saith the Lord, Ask ye now among the Heathen, who hath heard such things. I will scatter them, as with an east wind, before the enemy: I will shew them the back, and not the face, in the day of their calamity*.*

So that, whether it be confidence or despair, that hinders reformation, the threatenings you see are the same. And the full execution of these threatenings, together with the cause of it, is thus recorded in the book of Chronicles. *The Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling-place. But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of God arose against his people, till there was no remedy. Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young or old: he gave them all into his hand†.*

How near we have approached to them in our guilt is too visible: how easily we may come to resemble them in our punishment is not less so. The hand of God is plainly lifted up over us: the only question is, Will we *humble ourselves under it*, or will we not? Will we yet acknowledge, that he is the Sovereign of the world, and obeying him the only way to prosper? Will we yet *seek him, while he may be found*‡; confess our sins, change our conduct, and petition for his mercy? There have been circumstances, in which repentance itself would not stop the course of temporal punishments, though

* Jer. xviii. 11, 12, 13, 17. † 2 Chr. xxxvi. 15, 16, 17. ‡ Isa. lv. 6.

though it will always prevent eternal ones : in which God hath said to his prophets, *Pray not for this people for their good. When they fast, I will not bear their cry ; and when they offer an oblation, I will not accept them : but I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence* *. Even to this extremity we may reduce ourselves : but that we are already in it, no way appears. The general rule of his providence is, *At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it : if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them* †. And it ought to be our persuasion, that we are within the rule. Our cause is unquestionably good ; and though we have been, most of us, lamentably wicked, yet through his grace many have preserved their integrity : and either for their sake, or his mercies sake, we still enjoy great blessings. He hath been far from forsaking us, to the degree that we have forsaken him : else our state were wretched indeed : and would we but now *humble ourselves thoroughly under his mighty hand*, there is no room to doubt, but *he would exalt us in due time*.

Whenever he calls upon us to use the instrument, he surely designs us to attain the end for which it was formed. Now penitent reformation is the natural as well as the appointed instrument for exalting both particular persons and communities. Religion works indeed by terror at first, and lowers the high spirits of the guilty ; but only to raise them again on solid grounds, instead of the treacherous props which kept them up before. Without it, there is no dignity in the condition of man : and how should there be any expected in his deportment ? If persons either believe not in one, who sees and rewards, or cannot hope that he will reward good to them ; if all that they promise themselves be here, and they apprehend, that neither annihilation or misery awaits them hereafter ; they will of course be many of them dangerous and mischievous, the generality of them, base and vile, attend solely to the indulgence of their fancies and their senses, *eat and drink, for to-morrow they die* ‡. Or if any sparks of worth

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* Jer. xiv. 11, 13.

† Jer. xviii. 7, 8.

‡ 1 Cor. xv. 32.

do remain, unextinguished by such a mean way of thinking, they will have only an occasional and partial influence. Or could it, in some few, be a constant and uniform one, yet they will be very few: and the body of a people, if they are without conscience towards God, will be without honour and probity towards men; without prudence and magnanimity in the conduct of themselves; profligate and despicable in all respects. But on the contrary, true religion, for I speak not of superstitious persuasions and observances, true religion places men above sordid interests, low pleasures, and worldly anxieties; teaches them to dread nothing but offending their Maker; to set their hearts on nothing but pleasing him; and to have no conception of pleasing him by any other means than rational piety and genuine virtue; it excites them, by the noblest of motives, to whatever is useful and estimable, and restrains them, by the strongest terrors, from whatever is bad and hurtful; obliges them to right behaviour in the highest prosperity, and supports them in it under the heaviest adversities; inspires men with the most earnest concern for doing their duty; and frees them from all concern about the consequences of it in this world, by presenting to their view the endless recompences of a better. Such, in some degree, is the influence even of natural religion; but unspeakably more powerful will that be found, *whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these we might be partakers of the divine nature* *.

Then farther, the sentiments which thus dignify every one's behaviour singly, must have the same influence upon all, considered as forming a community. Public welfare will never be consulted as it ought, while men act merely on separate selfish bottoms; nor ever fail to be consulted, when a well-founded faith in God animates their zeal for general good. Sights and provocations, difficulties and risks, private advantages, and party or personal attachments, may very easily sway and bias all that act from temporal motives; but are nothing to such as act from this, the only one that cannot possibly be at any time overbalanced. So long as the state of affairs is calm indeed, government may go on very smoothly,

* 2 Pet. i. 4.

ly, without much principle in those who are employed by it, or live under it ; perhaps the more smoothly for a while, in some cases, the less principle there is. But when storms rise, as after such calms they will rise, then is the time to see in what the real strength of society consists ; who will struggle, who will hazard, who will be faithful to the last. They that fear God certainly will : and we can have no certainty (how should we ?) of any other. Amongst the truly religious, because they are such, there will be secure and mutual trust, faithful economy, and unwearied application ; their counsels will be steady, their undertakings just, their execution bold, their confidence in Heaven strong, and their adherence to a righteous cause unmoveable ! Seldom, if ever, will a state, which proceeds in this manner, fail of success. And were they to fail ever so greatly, nay, to be overwhelmed ever so entirely, they would fall with more reputation and more happiness than others flourish. But there is always reason for better hopes. A nation, reverencing the Sovereign of the Universe, will be revered by all around them, as *a wise and understanding people, which hath the Lord nigh unto them* *. Their friends will know they can depend on them ; their enemies will know they have the utmost efforts to fear from them ; both will know, and they themselves too, that even in their last extremity Providence may be expected to fight for them. *Great are the troubles of the righteous ; but the Lord delivereth him out of them all. The Lord delivereth the souls of his servants : and they, that put their trust in him, shall not be destitute* †.

But then it must be observed, that such as have long been sinners, and are at last become penitent (the former is certainly our case, would to God the latter were !) if relief doth not appear immediately, ought to wait for it with much patience, and be well satisfied if they are *exalted in due time* : in God's time, not their own. Wickedness ruins nations by degrees, reformation may restore them by degrees. An imperfect reformation will be likely to bring forth but imperfect fruits. And the completest reformation of a few may prove insufficient to save the whole. Still these are reasons

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* Deut. iv. 6, 7.

† Psal. xxiv. 20, 22.

only why all should repent ; not why none should, unless all will ; which it is impossible to foresee. For, be the generality ever so incorrigible, and their destruction ever so absolutely decreed on that account, there is encouragement enough notwithstanding, for those who do humble themselves, and return to a better mind. *Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment. It may be ye shall be bid in the day of the Lord's anger**. At least, whatever such may suffer in common with others, far from being a mark of his anger towards them, will contribute largely to improve their virtues, and increase their future reward. So that in every event they may *cast all their care on God, for he careth for them†*. Undoubtedly they will feel the uneasiness which human nature must from whatever is painful to it ; and, in particular, a tender concern for multitudes who have none for themselves. But still they will submit, with composedness and reverent approbation, to the severest sentences of Heaven ; and reflect with joy, that their chief interest is safe, though inferior comforts be lost.

Let us therefore *acquaint ourselves with God, and be at peace‡* : *For he will keep those in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on him§*. Whoever they are, that, sensible of their offences and their weakness, apply for the pardon obtained by Jesus Christ, and the grace communicated by the Holy Spirit ; who, in their private capacity, honour God, study to be harmless and useful amongst men, and govern themselves by the rules of virtue ; who also, in their public capacity, earnestly *pray for* and impartially seek the *peace of Jerusalem* ||, the welfare of their country, civil and religious ; not led by interest, resentment, or vanity, but having at heart real common good : and who, in their whole conduct, encourage and restrain themselves, as the case requires, by the faith of a future recompence : whatever may befall the society of which they are part, it shall be well with them. Whatever else they may undergo, others will have nothing to reproach them with ; they will have nothing to reproach their own souls with ; and *in the darkness light shall arise un-*
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* Zeph. ii. 3.

† 1 Pet. v. 7.

‡ Job xxii. 21.

§ Is. xxvi. 3.

|| Psal. cxxii. 6.

to them*. All such persons, therefore, after doing conscientiously what is incumbent on them, not only may, but ought to be without solicitude; and should let the foundation of their peace be known, that all around them may perceive how vastly preferable the consolations of religion are to every other method of making themselves easy. The pious man doth not labour to quiet his thoughts, by obstinately shutting his eyes, or plunging into excesses, or taking off his attention by amusements; but can with tranquillity look towards the evil day, and see it coming; wait for it, and bear his share of it, less or greater; being assured, that *all things work together for his good*†. A very different state from theirs, who know they have deserved the judgments of God; who know they have contributed to bring them down on their own and others heads; who have nothing to cheer them, when the clouds gather on every side of them: nothing to direct them, when the blackest tempest pours upon them, but the momentary glimmerings of human hope, struck out by their own imaginations; and if they should escape, if they should outwardly prosper again for the present, will only be tempted by it to *treasure up to themselves hotter wrath against the day of wrath*‡ and final judgment. But hear, I entreat you, how the word of God expresses the case of each: and may its enlivening exhortation to the former, and its terrifying admonition to the latter, sink deep into your breasts. *Who is among you, fearing the Lord, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God. Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, and compass yourselves about with sparks; walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks which you have kindled: this shall ye have of mine hand, ye shall lie down in sorrow*§.

* Psal. cxii. 4. † Rom. viii. 28. ‡ Rom. ii. 5. § Isa. l. 10, 11.

S E R M O N CXX.

(Preached on occasion of the Rebellion in *Scotland* in 1745.)

TRUST IN GOD, AND EXERTION OF COURAGE, OUR DUTY IN
TIMES OF NATIONAL DANGER.

2 SAM. X. 12.

Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people, and for the cities of our God: And the Lord do that which seemeth him good.

MANY of you, I hope, remember, that I discoursed to you upon these words a year and seven months ago * ; when God, for our sins, threatened us first, with what, for the continuance of them, he hath at length permitted to fall on part of this land. The renewal, and nearer approach, of the same danger, requires a more earnest inculcating of the same exhortations. For perhaps we may now lay to heart the things we did not then. It is very true, the pulpit ought never to be prophaned, and I trust never hath been, or shall by me, to serve the purposes of party-interest ; or intermeddle with any points of a political nature, about which the friends of their country, that think at all, can possibly be of different opinions. But the present is a common cause, affecting every one of us, without distinction, in what is most important to us ; and God forbid, that the ministers of the gospel should be either unwilling or affraid to speak, when his providence calls to them so loudly, to lift up their voice. Should the storm, which is now beating on many of our fellow-subjects, be dispersed by
infinite

* February 26. 1743-4.

infinite goodness ever so soon and so entirely, without reaching us ; it may yet be of unspeakable use, to have made the proper reflections and resolutions, whilst it was approaching towards us. And should the Almighty suffer us to feel it, as we have well deserved, nothing, but thinking and behaving rightly under his judgments, can give us hope of his mercy to moderate and shorten them.

Now whatever is requisite for these ends, is clearly comprehended in the words of the text ; which bring naturally to our thoughts the three following particulars.

I. The interests we have at stake. *Our people, and the cities of our God.*

II. The spirit which we ought to shew in defending them. *Be of good courage, and let us play the men.*

III. The humble dependance on heaven, which we ought to exercise at the same time. *And the Lord do that which seemeth him good.*

I. The interests we have at stake. *Our people and the cities of our God :* in other words, our civil rights and our religion.

The defence of their persons and possessions against lawless power, and the secure enjoyment of the means of happiness here and hereafter, were the great motives, that induced men to submit originally to government. And every particular government is good or bad, as it answers or fails of answering these purposes. Now in our own, as it stands at present, our liberties are greater than those of any other nation upon earth : we enjoy them so fully, that we abuse them beyond example ; and, I believe, no one person amongst us, of knowledge and consideration, doth or can suspect our king of having the least design to infringe any branch of them. The private property of the very meanest is as safe from the violence and oppression of the greatest, as good laws and an impartial execution of them can be hoped to make it. And for the public burthens we labour under, we have laid them on ourselves, by representatives of our own choice, for uses, which we and our fathers, very justly in the main, thought necessary : In particular, for the most important use of securing the nation, from time to time, against the mischief that now once more hangs
over

over us ; which if we at last get rid of, all we have spent is well laid out ; and if we submit to, all is thrown away.

Still, there may doubtless have been faults committed, in relation both to these and other matters. But then, part of the faults commonly charged may be imaginary ; for we are all as fallible, as those whom we blame ; and few of us in so good a situation for judging. Part may be of small consequence ; and therefore no ground for any great resentment. Part may have arisen from our own misconduct, as much, if not more, than from that of our superiors. Part again may have proceeded from excusable mistakes or infirmities of theirs ; for which, as we need allowance in ourselves, we should make allowance in others ; especially in princes, for the same reason as in parents ; and to a fit degree in those also that are employed by them. But whencesoever apprehended grievances may have come, we have legal, constitutional, peaceable means for redressing them, with uncontrolled liberty to use those means, if we will. And suppose they have not operated so speedily or so effectually as we may wish, yet if force may be used instead of them, upon every failure or delay, especially when caused merely by difference of opinions amongst ourselves, no society can ever subsist. And if we are too corrupt a people, to expect any good from mutual persuasion ; much less can we expect it from mutual violence.

Then, lastly, as for our religion ; the least valued, I fear, yet infinitely the most valuable of all our blessings ; and which guards and fences the rest, in a manner that nothing else can : our religion, I say, is undeniably the most rational and worthy of God, the most humane and beneficial to men, the furthest from being either tyrannical or burdensome, the freest from superstition, enthusiasm, and gloominess, of any in the world. It is established with such care, that the support of it is inseparable from that of the civil government ; yet happily with such moderation, as to bear hard on none who dissent from it. The practice of it indeed, we must own, hath not been enforced on its professors, so generally or so carefully as it ought, either by the authority or the example of those, whose duty it is. Would to God it had ! God grant it may ! But still, they, who have not duly excited men to piety, have

not restrained them from it : and every one's disregard to it is principally chargeable on himself alone.

This I apprehend to be a true and a modest account of our present condition : for I have put the advantages of it at the lowest, in order to say nothing that can be disputed. And what are we to charge it for, if the attempt now making should succeed? Indeed what have we to expect before it can succeed, (for every one must be convinced, that it will not be tamely submitted to), but a wide and horrid view, in proportion as it makes a progress of bloodshed, in the field and out of it, and of ravage at the pleasure of a rude and uncivilized people, to the imminent hazard of every thing, and every person, dear to us? Judgments which this island hath been long without experiencing ; but how long, and how heavily it may groan under them now, unless a speedy check be given to this rebellion, God only knows. For a conquering enemy, had he the will, which is dreadful to trust to, hath often not the power of restraining the desolations of fire and sword, when once they are begun.

But suppose this beginning of sorrows over, what must follow?

With regard to our civil concerns, how large numbers are there, who have no other security for a considerable part, it may be the most, or the whole of their property, than the continuance of the government now in being ; in whose hands it actually is? And should that government fail, as it cannot be hoped, that what hath been lent for its support, and proved one of its main supports, will be regarded very favourably by those who come to overturn it, how terrible may the distresses of such persons be, and how much farther than themselves must they extend? To all their domestics, all their dependants, all that have dealings or concerns with them. What multitudes are there again, whose fortunes are entirely, or principally, built on royal grants, judicial determinations, or acts of the legislature, made within the last six and fifty years? which, in case of a change, will all become questionable, as done by incompetent authority, and lie at the mercy of we know not whom. The person, who now threatens us, comes attended with a large and an indigent train of followers, collected from each of the three nations, who will think, and do

their utmost to make him think, that the long sufferings of many of them, and the present dangerous services of many more, can never be rewarded with sufficient bounty. And when revenge, and poverty, and avarice, are set on work together, what forfeitures may be claimed, what misdemeanors and treasons charged in a nation, which will be looked on as the whole of it involved in treason for so many years past; or how unfairly the plainest laws in our favour may be interpreted to admit of such attempts, or even wrested to serve them; which of us all can so much as guess, or who can be assured of his own safety?

But besides these hazards to the properties and the lives of particular persons, in what state will the commerce and possessions of the nation be? Think what innumerable debts the pretender to his majesty's crown must needs have contracted in so long a space, during which he hath had nothing of his own to subsist on: think what immense sums foreign princes may charge on account of most expensive wars, which they may plead were begun or carried on for his service; and how dreadfully this nation may be exhausted, to satisfy but a small part of these demands; for which it will make no amends, to annihilate the present incumbrances on our public revenues, by a ruinous breach of the public faith. Think also, once more, what fatal concessions the powers who support the present invasion, and who will be wanted for a continual support, even were it to succeed; what fatal concessions they will assuredly require in return, of places on which our trade depends, of indulgences in trade to themselves, of restrictions upon us; which will reduce us to a condition impotent, precarious, and despicable.

I say not this, or any thing, to raise in you a spirit of unchristian bitterness, either against the ignorant wretches that have been deluded into this rebellion, or even against their leaders. Let them be judged of with all the charity, let them be treated with all the mercy, which their case will possibly allow; only let us see the mischief, that their success would bring on us, and exert ourselves accordingly to prevent it.

But were we ever so safe in other respects, what security can we have with respect to our happy, envied, legal constitution; when that power of suspending and dispensing with
laws,

laws, and levying money without law, which lays every provision, that can be made in favour of the subject, wholly at the sovereign's feet, and yet was not only claimed, but exercised immediately before the revolution, should come of course to be established as a just prerogative, by what will be called a restoration? The rights, that we have enjoyed as indisputably our own, from that time to this, may then be accounted seditious and treasonable pretences; and every expression of fondness for any remain of liberty, be deemed a step towards rebellion; as indeed it will be thought but natural, to suspect and stifle the least breathing of that spirit which once delivered us, in order to prevent another change. Efforts notwithstanding will, in all likelihood, be made towards one; how bloody and how fatal, who can tell? The apprehension of these efforts will be a much stronger plea, than in the late King *James's* time, for keeping up a chargeable and dangerous standing force, perhaps a foreign one. The dread of that force will intimidate some; and the principle of turning to their own advantage what they cannot help, will entice others to go every length of compliance that they are required. And a prince, coming in on the bottom of right hereditary and indefeasible, will think he hath the clearest title to absolute power. His partisans, even whilst he is out of possession, have openly avowed that he hath; and what can be expected then, if he should get into it? The mere exercise of such a power very probably will not satisfy; but declarations and oaths be invented for the acknowledgment and support of it; which it will be impossible for us either to make with innocence, or to refuse with safety.

Then for the state of our religion: No one instance can be given, that Popery ever spared Protestantism for any continuance, after it was able safely to oppress it. But least of all will favour be shown here longer than necessity obliges. For, to whatever tenderness many of that communion may be inclined, as, no doubt, there are numbers amongst them of mild and worthy persons, yet the uncharitable part will assuredly prevail, as they always have done everywhere; and falsely imputing to our religion that pretended disloyalty, which proceeded only from their illegal attempts to overturn the whole constitution, will not fail to argue, that the same cause must

produce again the same effect, and therefore must not be permitted to subsist. Think then, all that love the church of *England*, all that believe the doctrines of the reformation to be the truth of Christ, what a condition it will be, either to profess and practise the falsehoods and impieties, of which you are so thoroughly convinced, or to be driven from this, and every other place of God's public worship, into corners; nay, in a while, to be dragged out thence also, and sacrificed to that *mother of abominations*, which hath so long been *drunken with the blood of the saints* *.

And let even them who are indifferent, or doubters, or unbelievers in religion, reflect on this at least; that, as they are always inveighing against superstition, so the church of *Rome* is over-run with it to the highest degree possible; and, as they are always exclaiming against the wealth and the power of ecclesiastics, so the wealth and the power, the pride and the tyranny of Popery, are unspeakably the greatest, that ever the world knew. And if they will notwithstanding go at present upon their favourite maxim, that all religions are the same, it will be a just judgment of God to make them feel the difference.

But to these things it may be answered, that the most solemn obligations have unquestionably been entered into, by him who claims the crown, for our entire security, both in church and state. Nor indeed could any thing seem in speculation more likely, because nothing is more apparently requisite in all common policy. And yet, surprising as it is, no one clear and explicit declaration of this kind was made by the pretender at the time of the last rebellion; nor can I hear of any made by him at present. And I beg you to consider, if he will not promise plainly now, what will he do afterwards? For as to any good words, given by another in his name, what can be easier for him, than to disavow them, as going beyond the commission which he granted? But suppose the strongest assurances given by himself; were they not given by the bloody *Queen Mary* to her Protestant subjects, who had fully merited them by their zeal for raising her to the throne? And did she not persecute them immediately, and burn them in little more than a twelvemonth? Were they

* Rev. xvii. 5, 6.

they not given by the late King *James*? And had he not strong motives of gratitude, as well as conscience, to keep them? And yet did he keep them for the smallest part of four years? How can we then flatter ourselves, that any one, who claims under him, will be at all more favourable to that religion and those liberties which have been all this time the capital enemies to his pretensions? The most formal declarations that he can make, have been over and over, and long since the revolution, declared by the authority of the see of *Rome* “utterly null and void from the beginning, wheever r
“they are prejudicial in any manner and the least degree” (I use the very words of Pope *Clement XI.* in the very case of stipulations made in favour of Protestants) “to the Catholic faith, the salvation of souls, or to any rights of the
“church whatsoever, even though such engagements have
“been often ratified and confirmed by oath*.” Let, therefore, the pretender to the crown make promises ever so full and expressive; let his natural dispositions to keep them be ever so favourable; yet, as he professes subjection of conscience to the Pope’s determinations, under whose eye he hath long resided; in whose dominions his son, who hath now invaded us, was born and educated, and by whose bounty they have both been all along supported, he cannot refuse to break any ties which shall be declared sinful by his infallible guide, who may purposely have connived at his engaging in them, in order to his breaking them at a proper time. But if he were to refuse it, can we imagine, that all his successors too will be so obstinately undutiful, as to spare a religion which they mortally hate, when they believe extirpating it will entitle them to heaven, and atone for all the sins of a wicked life?

It must be acknowledged, Popery hath appeared milder of late than in former ages. Yet even our days have known the executions of *Thorn*, and the banishments of *Saltzburgh*: and *France*, this very year, hath been persecuting and murdering our Protestant brethren for the profession of their faith. Nor hath the church of *Rome* ever given up any one of the claims which it may have forborn to exercise; and, should it once
regain

* Clem. XI. Pont. Max. Epist. et Brevia. fol. Romæ, 1724. tom. ii. p. 179.

regain so much of its ancient power, as would necessarily follow from prevailing here, it would soon resume its ancient fierceness in proportion.

Shall we persuade ourselves then, that fear will restrain a Popish prince from attempting to overturn our religion and laws? But what if his greatest fear should be that of damnation for not attempting it? which was the known case of King *James*, and may be that of others after him. Or what if it should be held the safest way, in a political view, to make thorough work at once, by the assistance of foreigners now preparing to invade us.

Still, it may be said, that whoever becomes our king, will at least, for his own interest, be careful of the trade and power of the nation. But how can he, if he would, when he must undoubtedly have promised the contrary to foreign powers already? And if he is capable of deceiving them, how shall we trust him? But supposing he hath promised them nothing, yet, if he prevails by their help, what can he be else than a deputy and a viceroy, subject to the commands of our most formidable adversaries?

This consideration ought, in reason, to alarm even those who wish well to his cause, even those who profess his religion, and make them utter enemies to his coming in such a manner, however desirous they may be of his coming otherwise. For can we, or can they, make terms with the power of *France*, when we have once given it footing in the heart of our country; or hope, that any terms which are made will ever be observed? Will that most ambitious and perfidious crown lose such an opportunity of weakening us by our own strength, making us dependent on itself for ever, and tools to enslave the rest of *Europe*? Will it not treat both us, and the king it sets over us, as the tyrant of *Babylon* did the prince whom he gave to the *Jews*? *He hath made a covenant with him, and taken an oath of him: he hath taken also the mighty of the land, that the kingdom might be base, that it might not lift up itself, but that by the keeping of his covenant it might stand**.

Such

* Ezek. xvii. 13, 14.

Such then being the view of our dangers, let us proceed to consider,

II. The spirit with which we ought to defend ourselves against them. *Let us be of good courage, and play the men.* These words may seem to express the duty of the soldiery alone: and, without question, they express that peculiarly; and, joined with the following ones, clearly shew, that a strong sense of religion, and a virtuous concern for the common welfare, are the true principles that will give military persons bravery and success, as they did to those whose history the text relates. But still the more literal translation is, *Be strong, and let us strengthen one another* *. In this sense they concern us all: this, therefore, I shall follow.

And if ever cause required exerting and joining all the strength and all the courage we have, this is that cause. For the attack is made by our enemies, foreign and domestic at once, on every thing dear to us, civil and sacred; and conscience towards God, as well as private interest and public good, demands our utmost zeal in such a contest.

The plea which some would use to check this ardour, as if the government we live under ought not to be supported, because the late King *James* and his son were set aside by the people, is absolutely groundless. For indeed King *James* set himself aside; abandoned the government wilfully, rather than administer it according to law; and, by so doing, left the nation at liberty, or rather under necessity to provide for itself in the manner it did; especially as he carried away the person, whom he called his son, along with him. And had he not been carried away, all the world knows, it was generally and strongly suspected, that he was not the queen's child; and the three estates of the kingdom, the only fit judges of a doubtful succession, fixed it, without taking notice of him. But had none of these things been so; that unhappy king, seduced by *Romish* bigots, had invaded, with a high hand, the religious and civil rights of his people; instead of giving the least hope of amendment, he was going on with rapidity to the utter destruction of both. And subjects were not made for princes, to be treated as their absolute property,
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* See Gen. xxv. 22. xli. 2. 2 Kings xiv. 8, 11.

and descend from one to another like cattle, let them be used as they will: But princes were made for their subjects, to govern them legally, and seek their good. What is the duty of the one, is the right of the other; and where there is a right, there ought to be a remedy. Common remedies are ever to be used in common cases; and if they are insufficient, single persons ought to bear every thing; and nations, every thing that can be borne without destruction, rather than break the public peace and established order of government. But in extreme, imminent, universal dangers, methods of the last resort, if necessary and likely to succeed, are fully warranted, by the nature of the thing, by our original constitution, by ancient practice upon it, and royal recognitions of it.

The scripture, indeed, commands what reason itself doth, subjection to the supreme powers. But how many other commands are there, which confessedly admit of proper exceptions? And were this to admit of none, yet the scripture doth not determine in whose hands the supreme power is lodged. And where it is divided, as it is with us, between the king and his great council, by whose joint authority every statute is expressed to be made, he who refuses to stand to that division, as the late King *James* did openly, both by word and deed, renounces the authority that belonged to him under it; and other authority he hath none. Or suppose even this doubtful, the scripture requires subjection: But to whom? To *the powers that be*, the actual, visible governments of every country. These, it declares, *are ordained of God*; and that *they who resist, shall receive damnation* *. Not the least hint given of inquiring into the justice of an establishment in its first rise long ago; a thing which few subjects can do, and perhaps few governments can bear. Not the slightest intimation of adhering for ever to the family of an abdicated prince; and going on, age after age, to ascribe the sovereign authority over a nation, to a person that hath no means of exercising any one act of authority. The necessities of mankind render it absurd; the practice and the notions of mankind have always been contrary to it. Heathens, Jews, Christians, Papists, Protestants, all the world have
agreed

* Rom. xiii. 1, 2.

agreed in the point with universal consent ; excepting a small handful of men in this one age and nation : Persons greatly to be pitied, and highly to be esteemed, while they submit peaceably to inconveniencies for conscience sake ; but surely guilty of as indefensible a singularity as ever was.

There may indeed often be a doubt, and sometimes it may last a good while, which are *the powers that be* : whether a government is yet to be considered as established, or not. But in our own case, if a duration of so many years, and the peaceable succession of so many princes, and the repeated acknowledgments of the whole people of these kingdoms, and of all the sovereigns and nations of the earth, do not make it a clear point, in whose hands the supreme authority of this country long hath been, and actually now is, nothing of such a nature can ever be clear at all. Very few of us have either known, or lived under any other government : we have all of us claimed, and enjoyed the protection of this ; we have acted in pursuance of its authority ; we have prayed continually for its preservation ; we have many of us bound our souls by solemn oaths, and some of us by repeated ones, to maintain it ; in so doing, we maintain at the same time, every thing that is valuable to us and our posterity ; and there cannot be a firmer tie upon us, than these things together ; nor more abandoned wickedness, than to break through it.

Strengthened thus then within ourselves, let us proceed to *strengthen one another*. God knows, instead of this, we have taken great pains to weaken one another, by separate interests and views, animosities and resentments, unkind suspicions, and unjust imputations. What party or sort of men hath been most to blame in this respect, were it ever so easy to say, would be very unfit ; when the plain concern is, not to accuse and recriminate, but all to unite in what affects all so nearly. They therefore, who have hitherto thought the danger of such an attempt small, let them now shew they were far from wishing it greater. They, who have been dissatisfied with particular measures of government, let them now give proof, that they were not disaffected to the government itself ; and if possibly in any thing they may have opposed too far, take this fittest opportunity of making amends. This will demonstrate the uprightness of their intentions, give weight

to their sentiments on other matters, and pull down the false hopes, that our enemies have founded on our domestic disputes. But then, at the same time, if zeal of any for the present establishment, hath tempted them to judge too hardly concerning the affection of others towards it, they ought now candidly to acknowledge their error; embrace those as true friends, who approve themselves to be such in the day of trial; and remember for the future, that strength is attained, not by division, but by union. Indeed we should all remember, instead of aggravating what our opposers have done amiss, to reflect seriously what we and our friends have been faulty in; and perhaps we should most of us find, it hath been a great deal too much.

But it is not mutual good temper alone that our case requires, but mutual assistance and encouragement, to be given with spirit by each of us, according to his ability, and the nature of his station, to all around him: by ranking ourselves openly on the side we are of; joining our counsels, contributing our money, hazarding our persons, if need require it; by instructing, undeceiving, exciting, fortifying as many others as we can. That part would be indifferent, part timorous, and all resist weakly, was the great thing, that the adversaries of the government promised themselves, and its friends were apprehensive of. God be thanked, both of them in some degree have seen their mistake. Let us go on to complete the conviction, by a daily increase of resolute activity. *Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees: say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not* *.

One thing more to be mentioned under this head is, that if the present endeavour to ruin us should increase, though it were considerably, the public expence necessary to defend us, we are surely neither to wonder, nor to murmur at it; but bear with cheerfulness what may be inconvenient, in order to prevent what must be ruinous; and consider well, that were this design to take place, we should probably pay much more to foreigners, as a reward for enslaving us, than now to our own governors, as the means of keeping us free.

But

* II. xxxv. 3, 4.

But human means alone, human prudence and strength, be it ever so great, is no sufficient ground of confidence. For *the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will**. We must never forget therefore,

III. An humble dependence on heaven for the event of all. *And the Lord do that which seemeth him good.*

What it will seem good to him to do with us, when we consider our national wickedness and ingratitude to him, it must be acknowledged we have great cause to fear. He hath blessed these nations beyond most, if not any other part of the world; and we have turned all his blessings into occasions of sin. He hath given us wealth, and we have applied it to the wicked purposes of dissoluteness and luxury. He hath given us liberty; and we have abused it to the bitterest hatred, and the grossest licentiousness. He hath given us true religion, and we have slighted and scorned it; cast off the worship of God, received the mercies of his providence without thankfulness, and the threatenings of it without humility; nay, ridiculed the obligations even of probity and moral virtue, till we have scarce principle enough left to be concerned for any thing, but present pleasure and present interest. Our abhorrence of Popery is gone: our zeal against slavery is degenerated into faction: our zeal for the government into private selfishness. We daily accuse another of these things; we never think of reforming ourselves. And what can be, in a rational view, the probable consequence, in a religious one, the just punishment of such behaviour, but that which the Divine Wisdom hath so clearly foretold? *For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord; they would none of my counsel, and despised my reproof: therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices*†.

It is by slow and silent, but it is by effectual methods, that God shews himself the governor of the world. Princes that neglect to support his authority, shall find their own decay with it. Subordinate rulers, that trust to other than virtuous arts of government, shall find they have leaned on a broken reed. And nations, that indulge profaneness and profligateness,

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* Dan iv. 17.

† Prov. i. 29, 30, 31.

ness, shall experience them to bring on confusion and ruin. Escaping it in one shape for once is nothing ; in that, or some other, it must fall upon them, if they continue such as they are. And were ever so great ruin to fall upon us now, what would it be more, than *Samuel's* prediction verified? *If ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king**. And what could we say, but acknowledge before God, with the penitent *Jews* in *Nehemiah*, *Thou art just in all that is brought upon us : for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly : neither have our kings, our princes, our priests, nor our fathers* (would to God there were not the most cause of all to add, nor we ourselves) *kept thy law* †.

Considering our case in this light then, we have small reason to *be of good courage*. And yet, considering the divine mercies, we are far from having any reason to despond, if we have any heart to repent. The cause we are engaged in, is that of right and truth, and God's own honour. Defending it valiantly, is performing one part of our duty to him ; and deserting it, would be filling up at once the measure of our iniquities to the utmost. Wicked as we have been, and are, yet if we will but, *at least in this our day, know the things that belong to our peace* ‡, there is still abundant room to trust in the gracious protection, that we have so often experienced ; and, provided we can but now bring our hearts in earnest to fear God, we have no need to fear man. What hath hitherto happened, is indeed more than enough to awaken us from that supineness, which it is astonishing we should have indulged so long ; but not at all to make us doubtful concerning the event, were there only any prospect, that we should render ourselves fit objects of our Maker's favour. For the sake of a few good, there may be mercy in store for the rest. The more of us become so, the greater is the hope. And would but this national alarm produce, what undoubtedly heaven hath designed it for, a national reformation, we might boldly say to our enemies, in the words of holy writ, *Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces : take counsel together, and it shall come to nought : speak the word, and*
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* 1 Sam. xii. 25.

† Neh. ix. 33, 34.

‡ Luke xix. 42.

it shall not stand : for God is with us. Sanctify, therefore, the Lord of Hosts ; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread, and he shall be for a sanctuary. For God will save Sion, and will build the cities of Judah. The posterity also of his saints shall inherit it ; and they that love his name shall dwell therein†. Their children shall continue, and their seed shall be established before him‡.*

* Is. viii. 9, 10, 13, 14. † Psal. lxix. 35. 36. ‡ Psal. cii. 8.

S E R M O N CXXI.

(Preached in 1745.)

AGAINST EXTREME SOLICITUDE CONCERNING WORLDLY AFFAIRS; AND THE WISDOM OF REPOSING UNBOUNDED CONFIDENCE IN THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD.

PHIL. iv. 6, 7.

Be careful for nothing: but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.

And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds, through Christ Jesus.

DANGERS are so constant, and sufferings so frequent, in human life, that behaving properly under the apprehensions and experience of them, constitutes a very considerable part of our business here. But when Providence permits a peculiar degree of either to be our lot, it calls us peculiarly to think what methods will best preserve us from them, or carry us through them. Now these are of two sorts; worldly prudence, and religious wisdom. The precepts of the former it is not the business of this place to deliver, but to limit and perfect them by the dictates of the latter; that we may neither endeavour to secure ourselves by acting wrong, nor doubt of support in acting right. We are apt to look on religion, very injuriously, as only prescribing disagreeable duties; whereas it suggests the kindest advice, and superadds the most comfortable promises; which cannot be done more completely, in the great point of moderating fear and uneasiness, than it is in the text; where we have

I. A

I. A friendly caution : *Be careful for nothing.*

II. A most necessary direction : *But in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.*

III. An assurance of the happy effect which this conduct will produce : *And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds, through Christ Jesus.*

I. A friendly caution : *Be careful for nothing.* Words which neither common reason allows us to take in their utmost extent, nor scripture itself. For it every where demands from us the most earnest care about the things of another world ; and enjoins, quite as often as it needed, a moderate care about the affairs of this. *Being careful*, therefore, must mean, in the passage which I have read to you, as an expression mighty little varied from it, being full of care, doth, for the most part, in our daily speech ; not a discreet and rational, but a disquieting and tormenting solicitude : and that principally, not concerning our behaviour, which is the only thing in our power, but the event, which is often entirely out of it. This the original *Greek* phrase elsewhere usually signifies, though not always. In the sixth of *St. Matthew*, it is many times rendered, *Take no thought*. But there also we must remember, that only what is immoderate was intended to be forbidden ; which it had been happy if our translation had more determinately expressed.

Thoughtfulness concerning our deportment, our welfare, that of others, and the public, so far as it will really be of use, is a duty of indispensable obligation. And first acting at random, then turning our eyes from the evil day, when we see it coming, instead of considering how we may avert it, or make the best provision against it, will prove the surest way to bring it on with its blackest horrors. But the contrary extreme, anxiety, is both a miserable feeling in itself, and the parent of many farther mischiefs, without any mixture of good. It represents every object of terror as vastly greater than it is in truth ; and frequently gives far more pain beforehand, than the presence of all that we fear is capable of giving. Nay, it makes us tremble at mere spectres ; and fills us with the most alarming suspicions, sometimes of what can-

not happen, often of what is highly improbable. And yet, were it ever so likely, excessive dread will do nothing towards preserving us from it. Calm reflection will instruct and excite us to do every thing for ourselves which we are able to do; and the utmost agonies of disquiet can never carry us beyond our abilities. Indeed, very commonly vehement emotions either hinder us from seeing what is fit, or disqualify us from performing it; nay, hurry us into what is very unfit and prejudicial to the point which we have in view.

But were they to leave us otherwise entirely masters of ourselves, that eagerness of looking farther than we can see, which they always beget, hath a powerful tendency to mislead us very unhappily. Dangers which we think we discern at a distance, may have no reality; or, if they have, may never draw near. Dangers that are near, may never reach us; and evils that have reached us, may vanish on a sudden. These are no reasons against prudent forecast; but they are strong reasons against extracting wretchedness out of speculations on futurity, instead of following quietly and cheerfully the proper business of the present day; since *we know not what another may bring forth**; and, consequently, require us to contrive or execute, to grieve or rejoice at. *To-morrow*, our blessed Saviour hath told us, *shall take thought for the things of itself*†: Time, as it runs on, will direct us much better than we can guess now, what precautions we are to take, and what judgments we are to form, about remote affairs: and since all that appears at this instant likely to fall out, or wise to do, may possibly in the next appear quite otherwise, we ought studiously to moderate both our actions and our passions, by recollecting the mutability of the world; which would save us a vast deal of fruitless labour and needless misery. We every one of us think the sorrows of life abundantly enough; why then should we multiply them by long anticipations, and load ourselves at once with misfortunes present and to come, unmindful of our gracious Lord's important maxim, *Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof*‡? Had our Maker framed the human mind in
such

* Prov. xxvii. 1.

† Matth. vi. 34.

‡ Matth. vi. 34.

Such manner, that we must have been *always forecasting grievous things* *; and suffering every hour, in thought, all that through a course of years we are to suffer in reality, and much more, we should certainly have looked on it as very hard usage. Why then will we bring ourselves into a state, in which if God had placed us, we should have complained of him as cruel? He hath mercifully hid future events from us, lest the foresight of them should make us unhappy: and we pry into them by conjecture, and dwell upon them by imagination, that we may be unhappy whether he will or not.

This, you see, is more than folly; it is evidently sin. He intended us to live here in comfort and peace; and we are not at liberty to frustrate his design, by making ourselves uneasy and wretched. Both nature and scripture plainly forbid it. Nor have we the least ground to hope, that the fault will be deemed a punishment severe enough for itself. Many others are accompanied with grievous misery, to which, notwithstanding, more hereafter is deservedly threatened. And the guilt of inordinate solicitude is greater than we generally apprehend. It implies not only disobedience to God, but distrust in him. It unfits us for the offices of piety and of common life. By dejecting the spirits, and souring the temper, it renders us different, in many respects, from what we should be, to all around us. It leads persons into strong temptations of raising and cheering themselves under their troubles, by false and pernicious supports, or of seeking deliverance from them by dishonest arts and compliances. It infects others, who see it, with the same apprehensions; which may produce the same or worse effects on their quiet, nay, their innocence. And in proportion as discouraging alarms become epidemical, the calamity dreaded becomes likely to happen. Still, so much of this wrong turn as is really constitutional and unavoidable weakness, will certainly not be imputed as criminal: and therefore we ought not to double our uneasiness, by adding to involuntary anxieties a rigid condemnation of ourselves for them, but strive against them to the utmost of our power; and then be satisfied with the consciousness that we have done so; only not deceiving our

VOL. III. U u hearts

* Wisd. xvii. 17.

hearts with a notion that we have resisted fears, which in truth we have indulged.

But some will say, "How can we resist them? Must we not of necessity be terrified at what we perceive is terrible; be concerned about what we are sensible is of great concern to us? Where is the virtue of pretending to blind ourselves, or even of doing it actually, if we could?" None at all certainly. But the rule prescribed you is, not to shut, but open your eyes, and contemplate the whole of your case deliberately and impartially. For perhaps it is not so bad, perhaps not near so bad, as you conceive, though you were to look on it only in a worldly view. And yet, were outward appearances, and our own strength, all that we had to look at, there would be no wonder if sometimes our hearts fainted within us at the prospect; for the stoutest and the proudest hearts have fainted before us on like occasions. But the never-failing foundation of comfort is this. A Being infinitely powerful, wise, and benevolent, superintends the universe continually: these attributes afford us large ground of hope; and, that our own unworthiness may raise no doubt, his express declarations give us full assurance, that if we fly to him with humble faith, *he will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape* *. The most usual anxiety of men is about the daily necessities of life. With respect to these, therefore, he condescends to argue with us particularly; and the argument will hold as well concerning less common exigencies; that since he sustains the vegetable part of the creation, which can do nothing for itself, and the animal, which cannot do near so much as we, certainly he will take of us, on doing what we ought, a care proportionable to the superiority of our nature. For in this lies the force of our Saviour's reasoning. And when he saith, *Behold the fowls of the air, they sow not, neither do they reap, yet your heavenly Father feedeth them: Are ye not much better than they* †? He doth not mean that they take no pains, and therefore we are to take none. They take a great deal, in seeking food, and contriving security against dangers, for themselves and for their

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young,

* 1 Cor. x. 13.

† Matth. vi. 26.

yeung, according to the extent of their faculties. And we are to take as much, in proportion to the extent of ours. But then, as providence furnishes to them, so far as consists with its wise purposes, whatever they need, and cannot acquire by their own power, the same providence will certainly watch over us with more peculiar tenderness, even in the present state; besides, that what we suffer now shall increase our happiness hereafter. And therefore, since they are easy in their condition, well may we in ours. For it would be strange indeed, if that order of earthly beings, which enjoys the greatest favour beyond all comparison, should be the only one discontented. Reflect then; where human care ends, the divine care begins. The duty of to-day is our business, the event of to-morrow is our heavenly Father's: and surely you do not wish to remove it out of his hands into your own; or surmise, that you can possibly be unsafe, while under the protection of him with whom *the very hairs of your head are all numbered* *. Here then we have a secure refuge against inquietude. But let us remember, if, having it, we use it not; if, professing faith in God, we allow ourselves to be as much disconcerted and perplexed on every alarm as they that *have no hope, and are without God in the world* †; we either think unworthily of him, or behave quite unsuitably to what we think; and our guilt is greater, as our temptation to it is less. When, therefore, on being troubled and cast down, we are inclined to lay the blame on accidental or natural lowness of spirits, or whatever excuse occurs, let us *take heed, lest there be in us an evil heart of unbelief* ‡ or disobedience. If there be, amending that is the way to *uphold him that was falling, and strengthen the feeble knees* §.

But in vain shall we attempt any thing beneficial to us, if we trust to ourselves for success. And, therefore, to make his caution effectual, the apostle subjoins

II. A most necessary direction. *In every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.*

The usual method is, to be *careful about many things* ||, and pray about nothing; but the right one is, to be careful

U u 2

about

* Matt. x. 30.

† Eph. ii. 12.

‡ Heb. iii. 12.

§ Job iv. 4.

|| Luke x. 42.

about nothing, but pray about every thing ; which is of importance enough to be laid before the Lord of All. The movements of our hearts, indeed, though unuttered, are clearly discerned by him : and he foresaw from eternity whatever we should wish on every occasion. But the scripture speaks in the language of men ; and calls that *making known our requests to God*, which is only expressing before him what he is perfectly acquainted with already, in order to imprint more efficaciously, on ourselves and others, the sentiments concerning him which belong to our condition.

Applying to the Almighty in our difficulties, immediately reminds us on whom we and all things depend : and brings it strongly to our thoughts, that the most threatening dangers cannot advance one step farther than infinite wisdom sees it proper they should, and infinite goodness permits. Placing ourselves in his presence, awes and composes our worldly fears ; not by a servile dread of him forcibly overcoming them, and substituting itself a still worse terror in their stead, but by a filial reverence, mixed with humble reliance on his favour, which calms and revives us in such manner, that we perceive our felicitudes to vanish, even whilst we are confessing them, and quickly smile at what we shuddered before. Then besides, venting our desires to him, shews us in the fullest light, which are sinful and to be repressed, if we hope for acceptance with him : and begging his help, must powerfully admonish us, that we are not to think of helping ourselves by methods displeasing to him, but adhere strictly to our duty, and be assured it will lead us out of whatever perplexities it leads us into. *Commit thy way unto the Lord, and put thy trust in him, and he shall bring it to pass* *. Further yet ; praying to *our* Father which is in heaven, leads us to consider him as our common Father ; who is concerned, not only for us, but for all our friends ; and expects us to be zealous for the general good, as well as our own ; and on no account to withdraw from the service of the body of which he hath made us members. Piety, therefore, excites the truest and firmest public spirit ; but smooths and tempers, at the same time, that roughness and vehemence which too frequently renders

* Ps xxxvii. 5.

renders it ineffectual and hurtful, by promoting, as it doth beyond all things, an humble opinion of ourselves, and meekness towards others.

With such dispositions, we shall be duly qualified for the mercy we intreat; and they who are, will never fail to receive it. For *this is the confidence which we have in him*, saith the beloved disciple, *that if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us. And if we know that he heareth us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we desired of him* *. We are sure of the very favours we beg, if they are conducive to his glory, and the happiness of his creatures; which doubtless the deliverance of this nation from its enemies must be, since we profess and support his holy truth, would we but penitently conform our conduct to it. And his long forbearance under our provocations, gives us room to expect every instance of mercy, in case of our amendment. What indeed the humble applications of a few may do for others, he only knows. But for themselves they will certainly obtain infinitely greater benefits, than sharing in the highest degree of earthly prosperity. Now, the sole reason of our praying for any thing is, that we suppose it will be good for us. And therefore we pray for nothing of this world absolutely, but on that condition. So that if God, who knows best, withholds it because it will be otherwise, he grants our request in the general, though he refuses it in the particular: and if we are wise, far from being overwhelmed by the severest dispensations, we shall not only be contented, but glad, in such measure as human infirmity and sympathy permit, that *his will should be done, not ours* †.

For this cause the apostle, when he might have said, what most people would have thought very sufficient, that we should *make our requests known unto God* with resignation, chose to say more, that we should do it *with thanksgiving*. And indeed we ought to be heartily thankful, not only for the many and great blessings, temporal and spiritual, national and personal, which God continues to us in the midst of his corrections, (O that we would all think seriously, how many and great they are) but even for his corrections themselves; and
much

* 1 John v. 14, 15.

† Luke xxii. 42.

much more for the alarms and warnings, the liftings up of his rod, which are designed to prevent the necessity of heavier judgments. What he doth with this view, though it produce terrifying apprehensions, is the most real kindness; the only kindness that we permit him at present to show. Many, we may hope, will be influenced by such awful notices, to amend their ways. But at least we need not fail of being influenced ourselves to what is right. And then, whatever the event be to those around us, to us it shall be happy; if in no other respect, yet in that, which, beyond all comparison, is of the greatest consequence: *Our light afflictions which are but for a moment, shall work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory* *.

Knowing these things, well might the apostle add in the text,

III. An assurance of the blessed effect, which raising our thoughts from earth to heaven will produce. *And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds, through Jesus Christ.*

Bad persons, as they have never any well-grounded, have seldom any long-continued peace of mind, even in prosperity; and much less can they hope for it in troubles and dangers. If they have not been just and merciful, they are conscious of ill-deserving behaviour to their fellow-creatures. If they have not been uniformly virtuous and religious, they know they have acted undutifully and ungratefully to their Creator. If they have not, by due application for pardon, reconciled themselves to him, the guilt of their sins remains upon them; and the whole creation is a weapon in his hands against them. They may be stupidly unmoved by these considerations; they may affect to hide their convictions, or strive to run away from them into whatever presents itself. But usually the liveliest and strongest natural spirits will sink under them in a time of severe trial. Or supposing they do not; the more obstinately such persons hold out, and the more gaily they go on, the heavier, in all likelihood, will be their present ruin, but the dreadfuller certainly their final sentence. For sooner or later, and with full recompence for ever so long delay, the
solemn

solemn and repeated denunciation must be verified, *Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap* *.

But the obedient and devout soul, which looks beyond worldly appearances, and rests itself on the Divine Providence, is entitled, whatever outward commotions happen, to the truest, the steadiest, the most delightful inward composedness; to that *peace of God*, that sense of being in friendship with him, that feeling of comfort and joy flowing from him, *which passeth all understanding*, exceeds the conceptions of those who have not experienced it, and shall exceed hereafter the present conceptions of those who have. Yet the sincerely good may not constantly enjoy a very high degree of this. The imperfection of their goodness, the lowness of their spirits, errors of judgment, sudden alarms, afflictions uncommonly grievous, may lessen, may interrupt it; or God may, for secret reasons of infinite wisdom, *hide his face from them* † for a time. But, ordinarily speaking, their tranquillity and consolation will be found proportionable to their improvements in real religion. And, though undoubtedly seasons of difficulty and hazard will give some uneasiness to the best minds, yet no more than is moderate and very tolerable, no more than leaves them, on the whole, in a peaceful state; and able to *cast* if not *all*, as they should, yet the most of *their care on him, who careth for them* ‡.

Let us therefore try ourselves by this rule, whether we have indeed practical faith and confidence in the Almighty. And if not, let us instantly labour to obtain it, by a total forsaking of *our iniquities, which have separated between us and him* §, and humble addresses *for grace to help in time of need* ||. The common resource is to the help of man alone; *there be many that say, who will shew us any good?* but the language of a well-instructed heart is, *Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us* ¶. *Some put their trust in chariots, and some in horses: but let us remember the name of the Lord our God* **: provide for our security with the utmost prudence, and defend our cause with the boldest zeal: but still rely on him alone, *who giveth victory unto kings* ††. Every
other

* Gal. vi. 7.

§ Isa. lix. 2.

¶¶ Psal. xx. 7.

† Psal. xiii. 1.

|| Heb. iv. 16.

†† Psal. cxliv. 19.

‡ 1 Pet. v. 7.

¶ Psal. iv. 6, 7.

other aid may fail, but God cannot. *He is able to save by many or by few* * : to break the arm of the wicked †, and disappoint the devices of the crafty ‡. *He stilleth the raging of the sea, the noise of its waves, and the madness of the people §.* Under his conduct, the things, that seem the most against us ||, may prove the very means of our deliverance; and the fiercest storms drive the ship with more speed into a safe harbour. Therefore say to them that are of a fearful heart, *Be strong, fear not : behold your God will come with a recompence ; he will come and save you ¶.* All who are penetrated with these truths, though timorous naturally, and while the danger is distant, shall, when it draws near, out of weakness be made strong, and wax valiant in fight ** : not with a tumultuous and transitory animal courage, but a calm and stedfast resolution, keeping, as the apostle expresses it, *their hearts and minds*, quieting their passions, fixing their judgments, and by consequence determining their behaviour. The reasonings of such persons will be those of the psalmist : *God is our hope and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear, though the earth be moved, and though the hills be carried into the midst of the sea ; though the waters rage and swell, and though the mountains shake at the tempest of the same. The rivers of the flood thereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, therefore shall she not be removed : God shall help her, and that right early. The nations make much ado, and the kingdoms are moved : but God sheweth his voice, and the earth shall melt away. The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge ††.* These are the grounds, and there cannot be stronger, on which a good person, unless he is wanting to himself, will not be afraid of any evil tidings : for his heart standeth fast, and believeth in the Lord ††. Nay, were it not the pleasure of God to deliver his people from their enemies, even in that case, they would be enabled to suffer according to his will, and commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator §§.

But

* 1 Sam. xiv. 6.

§ Psal. lxxv. 7.

** Heb. xi. 34.

§§ 1 Pet. iv. 19.

† Psal. x. 15.

|| Gen. xlii. 36.

†† Psal. xlii. 1—7.

‡ Job v. 12.

¶ Isa xxxv. 4.

‡‡ Psal. cxii. 7.

But then we must ever observe, by whose means alone this unconquerable firmness, this inconceivable serenity, is to be acquired. *The peace of God shall keep your hearts and minds, through Christ Jesus.* For as, without faith in religion, persons very often have no refuge at all in the storms and troubles that overtake them; so, without faith in the Christian religion, they are liable still to most uneasy and disheartening fluctuations; from doubts, how far providence extends; doubts of their own title to forgiveness and favour, doubts of the existence and duration of a future reward; to all which the gospel hath put the happiest end; informing mankind with certainty of every thing that could induce them to act right with cheerful perseverance; and confirming the highest expectations, which they can possibly entertain, by that equally convincing and affecting argument: *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things**? Thus then we have hope, as an anchor of the soul, sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; lays hold on the promised state of invisible glory, whither the forerunner is entered for us, to take possession already in our name, even Jesus†: whose gracious words to his disciples we ought to have constantly present to our thoughts, when clouds arise and darken our prospect, hang over our heads, and seem ready to burst upon us. *These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer: I have overcome the world*‡. *Peace I leave with you: my peace I give unto you: let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid*§.

* Rom. viii. 32.

† John xvi. 33.

‡ Heb. vi. 19, 20.

§ John xiv. 27.

S E R M O N CXXII.

(Preached in 1746, on the Victory at CULLODEN.)

ON MERCIFUL DELIVERANCE FROM IMMINENT DANGERS,
AND THE DUTY OF GRATITUDE TO GOD ON ACCOUNT OF
THEM.

2 COR. i. 9, 10.

But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead : Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver ; in whom we trust, that he will yet deliver us.

OUR gracious sovereign having appointed, of his own mere motion and personal piety, a solemn acknowledgment to heaven, for our late victory over the rebels, to be inserted in the prayers of this day, permit me, as far as I am able, to be *a helper of your joy* * on that happy occasion. And may God effectually dispose us all to *rejoice before him* † in so wise and religious a manner, as may lay a sure foundation for his *re-joicing over us to do us good* ‡ ; for his going on to *comfort us again, after the time that he hath afflicted us, the years wherein we have suffered adversity* §.

I hope it may promote this blessed end, if we consider our condition in the same views in which the text places before us that of the apostle St. Paul, comprehending an account,

I. Of his danger : *A great death, of which he had the sentence within himself.*

II. Of

* Verse 24.

† Deut. xii. 12.

‡ Jer. xxii. 41.

§ Psal. xc. 15.

II. Of his defender from it: *God, who had delivered, and did still deliver him.*

III. Of the reasons for which he was first permitted to fall into this danger, then brought out of it: *that he might not trust in himself, but might trust in God, which raiseth the dead:* as accordingly he declares he doth, for deliverances yet future.

I. His danger: *A great death, of which he had the sentence within himself.* Death being the extremity of temporal sufferings, in the *Hebrew* idiom, which expresses every thing strongly, signifies any very dreadful evil or hazard. Thus *Pharoah*, on the plague of locusts, begs of *Moses*: *Entreat the Lord your God, that he may take away from me this death only**. But more especially hazard of life goes under that name. Whence *David* speaks of himself, as *counted with them that go down into the pit; free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave*†. Now *St. Paul*, to use his own phrase towards the latter end of this epistle, had been *in deaths often*‡. And therefore the term, *so great a death*, must denote, that on the occasion, to which he refers, his peril was imminent; peculiarly terrible, and, humanely speaking, unavoidable. His own words are, *we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life*§. Farther particulars cannot now be discovered, excepting one, which he adds, of small consequence to us, that this trouble came to him in *Asia*. But, by his manner of notifying it, and the warmth of his description, it must have been recent, since he wrote the former epistle.

How lately we have been in like distress you all know. How *great a death* we must have suffered, had our enemies prevailed; how total a destruction of every thing valuable to us on earth, that can be destroyed by man; I endeavoured to shew you at the very beginning of their attempt; and the whole body of the nation, God be thanked, have expressed the strongest detestation of it. May neither the horror of the impending ruin, nor the frightful probability there was of its overwhelming us, ever be forgot! Recollect, I entreat you, what your successive apprehensions have been for many months

X x 2

past;

* Exod. x. 17.

† Psal. lxxxviii. 4, 5.

‡ Chap. xi. 23.

§ Ver. 8.

past ; on the early and entire, and easy defeat of our forces by the rebels ; on the defenceless condition in which the island then was ; on their passing afterwards unhurt by two armies posted to intercept them, and approaching towards this capital ; on the prospect of powerful assistance to them from abroad ; on the credible, though happily false, intelligence of our being actually invaded ; on the safe retreat of our domestic enemies into the north, to join, as it was affirmed and believed, with foreign succours there ; on our second disappointment in battle, a fatal one it might have proved ; on the continual dangers, to which that heroic prince was exposed, whose presence and conduct, and courage and activity, were so essentially necessary for animating our dispirited troops ; on the reassembling and successes of our foes, after a seeming despondency and dispersion ; on the largeness of their numbers, the advantages of their situation ; and lastly, on the strong report of what was but too possible, a complete victory obtained by them, when indeed one had been obtained over them, of which we were ignorant. Had we not often, during this period, *the sentence of death within ourselves ?* Were we not *troubled on every side ; without were fightings, within were fears* * ; *mens hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which were coming on the earth* † ? And had we been asked, at some junctures especially, as the prophet was, in language akin to that of the text, *Can these dry bones live ?* Can this exhausted nation rise up again, and shake off the pressures, from every quarter, under which it labours ? What other reply, at best, could we have made than his ? *O Lord God, thou knowest* ‡. For surely the wisest of men did not know ; nor could the bravest answer for the event, after it had been so frequently contrary to what we thought the most rational expectations. Of this only there was certainty, that we had the loudest call to adopt the psalmist's prayer : *O God, thou hast cast us off, and scattered us ; thou hast also been displeased : O turn thee unto us again. Thou hast moved the land, and divided it : heal the breaches thereof, for it shaketh* ||. And praised be his name, that we can now add the words
which

* 2 Cor. vii. 5.

† Ezek. xxxvii. 3.

‡ Luke xxi. 26.

|| Psal. lx. 1, 2.

which follow those : *Thou hast given a token for such as fear thee, that they may triumph because of thy truth* *.

And we have accordingly triumphed in this comfortable earnest of prosperity, returning to us after so long an absence, with a joy as cordial and universal as perhaps this nation ever expressed. May both our friends and our enemies know it, and draw the natural conclusions from it, to the encouragement of the former, the dismay of the latter ! But then, if we *triumph* only for the safety of our persons and properties, and not *because of God's truth*, and pure religion ; if we rejoice, and overlook the author of our joy, *the giver of all victory*, we shall fall inexcusably short of our duty, and the example set us by the apostle ; who subjoins immediately to his account of the danger which he had escaped,

II. A thankful mention of his defender from it : *God who had delivered, and did still deliver him.*

It is evidently both as easy for the Supreme Being, and as worthy of him, to govern the universe, as to create it. Indeed the only purpose for which divine wisdom could create it, must be to conduct every part of it to a right end : and the smallest parts are no more beneath his attention than the greatest ; for he is infinitely above all. What reason thus teaches, holy scripture confirms, with important additions ; informing us, that a future day is appointed for the full and final display of his justice and goodness towards the children of men ; but that, in the mean time, his providence is active, so far as the constitution of things established by him permits ; and not the least occurrence comes to pass, without the superintending care of *our Father which is in heaven* †. We are often indeed ignorant by what means he acts ; for he is able to influence, unperceived, not only the course of inanimate nature, but the minds of rational agents, and to produce the greatest events from the slightest occasions. We are often equally ignorant of his views in acting ; for *we know but in part* ‡ ; whereas *all things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do* §. The imperfection of our discernment, therefore, must be no hindrance to our faith ; but our plain duty is to reverence implicitly those proceedings

* Psal. lx. 4.

† Matt. x. 29.

‡ 1 Cor. xiii. 9, 12.

§ Heb. iv. 13.

proceedings of his, the manner and grounds of which are hid from us ; as well as to pay him more particular acknowledgements on account of such as we understand.

For in many cases the hand of God is clearly visible ; but nowhere more than in the correction, and yet preservation of *states professing his holy and eternal truth* * ; as indeed there cannot be on earth fitter objects of his righteous providence. Thus in all ages he hath watched over his church. Thus more especially he hath treated this church and land ever since the reformation : *visiting our offences with the rod, and our sin with scourges ; nevertheless his loving kindness hath been not utterly taken from us, nor suffered his truth to fail* †. *Many a time have they fought against me from my youth up, may Israel now say ; yea, many a time have they afflicted me from my youth up, but they have not prevailed against me. The ploughers have ploughed upon my back, and made long furrows : but the righteous Lord hath hewn the snares of the ungodly in pieces* ‡. And surely in the troubles which we have undergone of late, a pious and thoughtful mind may trace evident footsteps of divine interposition. Why else, on the one hand, did our enemies increase, prevail, and escape so surprisingly, for so long together ? Why, on the other, did they so unaccountably miss the fairest and most palpable opportunities of undoing us effectually ; neither pursuing at home the advantages they had gained, nor procuring the succours which their friends abroad in all prudence ought to have sent them ? And why, lastly, have they allowed us to obtain so decisive a victory, in a few moments, at the expence of so little blood lost on our side (would God their own, poor deluded wretches, could have been spared), when both from the encouragement of their preceding successes, and the necessity of exerting themselves to the utmost in this crisis of their fate, a very obstinate engagement was to have been expected ? Whence have these things happened thus, but that *God ruleth in the kingdom of men* || ? *The Lord maketh the devices of the people to be of none effect, and casteth out the counsels of princes. But the counsel of the Lord shall endure* for

* Office for November 5.

† Ps. cxxix. 1,—4.

‡ Ps. lxxxix. 32, 33.

|| Dan. v. 21.

for ever, and the thoughts of his heart from generation to generation. Blessed are the people whose God is the Lord Jehovah; and blessed are the folk that he hath chosen to be his inheritance *.

Let us learn, therefore, and acknowledge, for it is a very bad sign if we are unwilling, that both our dangers and our deliverances are from above. This will in no degree lessen the guilt of our enemies; for they were prompted by their own wickedness unjustly to attempt what Heaven, for our wickedness, might justly have permitted. Nor can it ever be a plea for yielding tamely to their enterprises, that God makes use of them to serve his purposes. We know not the extent of those purposes; which he will certainly execute, as far as they extend; and are therefore to do our evident duty. If he suffers our adversaries to attack our most valuable rights, he both empowers and commands us to defend them; and they who consider themselves as his instruments for this end, will act with unspeakably more faithfulness and zeal than such as are induced by worldly motives alone; which frequently other worldly motives, and sometimes very trifling ones, may outweigh; whereas there is no counterbalance to a principle of conscience. Nor doth it in the least detract from the merit of our soldiers and commanders, that *the salvation of the righteous cometh of the Lord, who also is their strength in the time of trouble* †. Every pre-eminence is more estimable for being his gift; every great action for being done by his guidance: and the highest of those who have wrought this deliverance for us, are surely the most deeply sensible, that the noblest of their distinctions is being employed by their Maker, and fellow-workers with him, for the support of genuine religion, virtuous liberty, and public happiness. This way of thinking will inspire the most composed moderation, along with the most undaunted bravery; and whoever makes it the basis of his conduct, will be entitled to all demonstrations of respect from men, and yet abundantly contented with *the honour that cometh from God only* ‡.

Every thing that befalls us, therefore, adverse or prosperous, let us look on it as proceeding from the just and good pleasure

* Ps. xxxiii. 10, 11, 12.

† Ps. xxxvii. 40.

‡ John v. 44.

pleasure of our heavenly Father ; humble ourselves before him in all our afflictions ; and, which is our present concern, be thankful to him in all our rejoicings. *If the Lord himself had not been on our side, let Israel now say, if the Lord himself had not been on our side, when men rose up against us, they had swallowed us up quick, when they were so wrathfully displeased at us ; yea, the waters had drowned us,—the deep waters of the proud had gone over our soul. But praised be the Lord, who hath not given us over for a prey unto their teeth* *. This is the language that expresses the truth of our case ; and it is of infinite importance that we own it unanimously. For the Sovereign disposer of the Universe will neither be denied nor forgot, without vindicating the glory of his name : and he hath long ago pronounced the sentence : *They regard not in their mind the works of the Lord, nor the operation of his hands ; therefore shall he break them down, and not build them up* †. But the duty and the necessity of such regard will more distinctly appear, by considering

III. The reasons for which the apostle was first brought into danger, then brought out of it : that he might learn by the former *not to trust in himself*, and by the latter *to trust in God, which raiseth the dead*.

Now, if there was need of improving St. Paul in this lesson, much more is there of teaching it others. And never, perhaps, was any nation, at least which made profession of faith in Christ, so deplorably inattentive to it as ours. Our wealth, our fleets, our valour, have been, for many years past, till very lately, our continual boast. And in vain had the scripture forewarned us : *Cursed is he that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord* ‡. How then should God convince us of so pernicious an error ; and shew us, that we were not sufficient of ourselves ? By the very method which he hath taken. *He hid his face, and we were troubled* || : Storms rose around us ; and the most dangerous, where we thought there was nothing to produce any : our navy produced no protection ; our valour sunk into panic terrors ; our riches were on the point of *making themselves wings, and flying away* ¶ ; a general bankruptcy

* Ps. cxxiv. 1,—5.

† Ps. civ. 20.

‡ Ps. xxviii. 6.

¶ Prov. xxiii. 5.

‡ Jer. xvii. 5.

ruptcy threatened us ; and what the *kings of the earth, and all the inhabitants of the world would not have believed, the adversary and the enemy were near entering into the gates of Jerusalem* *. Who could possibly have apprehended, that the landing of six or seven men should have put this great nation into such confusion ? Who could ever have conceived, that the disturbers of our peace should have multiplied and conquered as they did ; should have advanced and retreated, and ranged at will through our land, with so perfect security, for so long a time ? And what is all this, but a call from God to know ourselves, and abase our pride before him ; a practical declaration, *that no flesh shall glory in his presence* † ?

But necessary as this instruction is, yet singly it is not enough. When irreligious persons have found by experience, that they cannot rely on their own strength, they have no other left to rely on ; and so are tempted to despair in their minds, to fail in their duty, to seek refuge in cowardly and treacherous artifices for their own preservation. But very different are the sentiments of the pious man's heart. Let ever so unexpected calamities happen, let ever so alarming dangers approach, with ever so little appearance of surmounting them, still he knows, that nothing can be so dangerous, as to desert the post in which God hath placed him ; and that *he who is faithful unto death, shall receive a crown of life* ‡. At the same instant, therefore, that he saith, *There be many that fight against me, O thou Most Highest*, he is enabled to say also, *nevertheless, though I am sometime afraid, yet put I my trust in thee* ||. And this is the spirit which God intends to excite, by sending, after extreme perils, remarkable and sudden deliverances. From these it is natural to learn faith in him *that raises the dead*, that restores from the most helpless condition ; and since *he hath delivered*, to form reviving hopes that *he will yet deliver* ; which we may and ought to do now. He hath given us a victory speedier, cheaper, completer, than we could even have flattered ourselves with. He hath given it by the means of a young prince, whose confessed abilities, vigilant attention, unwearied diligence, and intrepid firmness, on all occasions, as well as his wonderful suc-

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* Lam. iv. 12.

† 1 Cor. i. 29.

‡ Rev. ii. 10.

|| Ps. lvi. 2, 3.

cess on the present, afford us the justest ground of persuasion, that he is chosen by providence for the service and support of his father, his family, his country. And the same God, who hath *begun to shew his mighty hand**, can, with the same ease, accomplish his good work, and bring it to perfection.

But then, alas ! what avails it that he can, unless we have cause to trust that he will ? And whence shall we have this ? Thankfulness for past mercies undoubtedly is the way to secure future. And just now we seem in earnest thankful. But if our gratitude prove to be superficial and short-lived, like that of the *Jews* : *They sang praise unto him : but within a while they forgot his works, they would not abide his counsel ;* what can we expect else, than judgments like theirs ? *Then he lift up his hand against them, to overthrow them*†. Our state, though vastly altered for the better, is still a very undesirable, indeed a very melancholy one. Our burthens are unavoidably augmenting, and our strength wasting. Foreign force may soon renew our intestine commotions ; or even, without their intervention, subject us all directly to itself. The failures of our friends give us, year after year, new reason to say with the psalmist : *O be thou our help in trouble ; for vain is the help of man*‡. *Put not your trust in princes, nor in any child of man ; for there is no help in them. Blessed is he, that hath the God of Jacob for his help, and whose hope is in the Lord his God*§. But we cannot hope for the continuance of his protection, unless we answer the intention of it ; which the nature of the thing, as well as holy writ, assures us is, *that being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, we may serve him without fear*||. It is not then, that we may sin against him without fear : that we return securely to the follies and vices, the impiety and profaneness, from which we abstained, while his hand lay heavy upon us. Then we professed to observe days of fasting and prayer. And what was the language of them ? “ Spare us, good Lord, that we may “ safely go on to be as bad as we have been, and worse ? ” Surely not. Some indeed expressed, even in the midst of danger, an open scorn of them : others were evidently kept from

* Deut. iii. 24.

§ Ps. cxlvi. 2, 4.

† Ps. cvi. 12, 13, 26.

|| Luke i. 74.

‡ Ps. lx. 11.

from it by mere outward decency. Many however were awakened, spoke and thought seriously, resolved well, prayed heartily. But are they not most of them already, or shall we not find them soon, relapsed again into their own neglect? For such hath always been the course of human nature, unless carefully restrained by conscientious vigilance. *When he slew them, they sought him, and turned them early, and inquired after God; and they remembered that God was their strength, and the High God their Redeemer. Nevertheless, they did but flatter him with their mouth, and dissembled with him in their tongue. For their heart was not whole with him; neither continued they stedfast in his covenant**. After this feint of reformation, they grew, as men always do, wickeder than before. And I beg you attend to the final consequence. *When God saw this, he was wroth, and took sore displeasure at Israel: He delivered their power into captivity; and their beauty into the enemy's hand†*.

If therefore it be asked, what we shall do to shew our thankfulness acceptably, the answer is plain: *Walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless‡*; but practise those with more especial zeal, which either our circumstances particularly require, or our hearts tell us we have particularly transgressed.

Common prudence is one part of our duty, which we have unaccountably slighted. We have encreased amusement and gaieties to a degree unexampled, just when providence hath called us most loudly to thoughtful consideration. We have encreased expensiveness to an equal degree, when perhaps our own fortunes, but certainly those of multitudes, whom our example tempts, and often almost forces to imitation, are incapable of bearing it. And both these indiscretions have produced personal miseries and national inconveniences without number. We have disregarded, and affect to disregard, the care of our families, and the proper business of our several employments, though sometimes perhaps important ones, not only to indulge our appetites, but to gratify our caprices: Behaviour in every rank and station, fruitful of mischief; but in the higher, of most dreadful and extensive mischief. In

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* Ps. lxxviii. 34, 37.

† Ps. lxxviii. 60, 62.

‡ Luke i. 6,

matters of national concern, we have followed our private interests, resentments, friendships, instead of truth, and right, and general good. We have framed and supported useless and hurtful distinctions and divisions; and been unjustly vehement in mutual reproaches, till our enemies were encouraged to fancy, that one half of us was ready to join them. We have vilified our governors, till we had almost disowned the blessings of government; and it was very near being too late, that our affection to an establishment on which our whole happiness depends, revived, after an indifference, that foreboded immediate ruin. Let us never forget more what we have been so seasonably convinced of now; but always esteem as highly our laws and liberties, and the august house that secures them, as we did in that hour, when the hazard of losing them was most imminent. But let us amend in every other point also; and while there is yet *space to repent* *, become a sober-minded, frugal, industrious, honest, and united people. For we cannot else continue a free one; neither the justice of God, nor the connections of human affairs will permit it.

These then are fundamental rules of private prudence. With those of public wisdom we have no concern here, beyond two particulars. The first is, our obligation to pray, that God would incline those who are in authority over us, to consider seriously what have been the causes of our troubles, and direct them to proper remedies: would enable them to preserve, both in punishments and precautions, the true medium between too great severity and too great indulgence: would instruct them, how to reconcile all that wish well to the community; and how to prevent others from renewing any more our sufferings, or their own. The second is, our consequent obligation to distrust our own judgment, rather than theirs, in matters of such difficulty; and to use our faithful endeavours, that what they determine may become effectual.

But how rightly soever we are disposed in these respects, if we continue to entertain the same contempt of religion, which

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* Rev. ii. 21.

we have manifested for a long time past, it is in vain to *trust*, that God will continue to *deliver us*, How much, or how little forbearance he may exercise, cannot be said; but sooner or later, *except we repent, we must perish* *. For, let us think of it or not, he is the ruler of the world; and he will approve himself to be such, by inflicting on those, who slight him, the vengeance they deserve. Indeed, could we leave them to themselves; as *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom* †, so casting it off is the inlet of folly. Religious motives are the only ones, that can, in all cases, either prompt to what is right, or restrain from what is wrong, with sufficient force; and when this tie is broken, no other will hold. Reason plainly shews it; scripture hath repeatedly foretold it; the experience of all ages confirms it; and there is no room left for us to carry the trial further, without utter destruction. We have been sinking for a great while, in proportion as we grew vicious and profane, till at last we were plunged in the very depth of distress. Once more, however, after seeming quite rejected, we have received a kind encouragement. But if we let judgments and mercies both be lost upon us, what can there remain, but final ruin?

Think then with yourselves, why should we not now return to God? Gratitude is a generous principle of action; and he hath furnished us with an opportunity for it. Hope is a nobler one than fear alone. And who can tell, what hope there may be yet for this nation, would we but apply to our offended Father with virtuous penitence? He can raise us friends where we least expected it, and change the hearts of our bitterest adversaries. For *he refraineth the spirit of princes, and is wonderful among the kings of the earth* ‡. *When the ways of a man please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him* §. But if their enmity continues, he can check, he can break their power at its very height; and *strengthen the hands* ||, direct the counsels, prosper the undertakings of his people; so that *no man shall be able to stand before them* ¶. *For his is the greatness, and the glory,*
and

* Luke xiii. 3.

† Ps. cxi. 18. Prov. ix. 10.

‡ Ps. lxxvi. 12.

§ Prov. xvi. 7.

|| Neh. vi. 9.

¶ Josh. i. 5.

and the victory, and the majesty : For the kingdom is the Lord's, and he is the governor amongst the nations †. Let it be thy pleasure, O Lord, to help us. Let all those that seek thee, be joyful and glad in thee : and such as love thy salvation say alway, The Lord be praised ‡.*

* 1 Chron. xxix. 11.

† Psal. xxii. 28.

‡ Psal. xl. 16, 19.

S E R M O N CXXIII.

(Preached *October 9. 1746*, on the Day appointed for a General Thanksgiving for the suppression of the Rebellion.)

ON THANKFULNESS FOR NATIONAL MERCIES AND DELIVERANCES; AND THE GREAT DUTY OF A VIRTUOUS OBEDIENCE ON ACCOUNT OF THEM.

JOHN v. 14.

Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.

AFTER seven yearly fasts, we have now, through God's mercy, before we have deserved it, one day of general thanksgiving: and surely our concern is to employ it so that we may hope for more. Now, there can be no wiser or kinder direction for this purpose, than that of our Lord in the text. He had just healed the person to whom he speaks, and therefore certainly did not mean to use him harshly in these words, but indeed to shew him still greater goodness than he had done already, as much greater as spiritual and eternal welfare is than temporal. His cure had been the heaviest of his misfortunes to him, had he behaved improperly upon it. But *Jesus found him in the temple*, whither probably he went with a devout heart, to give God praise. This promised well concerning him, yet by no means rendered a strong warning to him superfluous. Permit me, therefore, finding you, and God be thanked that I find so many of you, in the temple on a like occasion, to treat you in a like manner. And think it not strange, I beseech you, if at present you hear not solely

the voice of joy, though never was a juster occasion for it, but are exhorted, even now, to *serve the Lord in fear, and rejoice unto him with reverence* *. I hope many teachers of his word will dwell this day on the same subject; for the advice here given by our gracious Master, comprehends every thing that our condition requires.

I. A thankful sense of the blessing which we have received. *Behold, thou art made whole.*

II. A firm resolution of virtuous obedience in return for it. *Sin no more.*

III. A prudent consideration of the danger of behaving otherwise. *Lest a worse thing come unto thee.*

I. A thankful sense of the blessing which we have received. *Behold, thou art made whole.*

At this time last year, and for many months after, we had a very afflicting sense of the judgments that threatened us; the whole nation had it, and with the utmost cause. Our religion, our liberties, our lives, our public independence, our private properties, were all at stake. Our forces were few, unsuccessful, and disheartened; the rebels were numerous, flushed with victory, and increasing. Then, besides what appeared, we knew not how much more evil we had to apprehend, from abroad or at home, from the fury of our enemies, from the coldness of our friends. The danger too was no less imminent than great; and must soon crush us, if not soon averted. We saw, and felt, and trembled at it; we exerted ourselves against it, with a spirit never known amongst us before: and God forbid we should have forgotten, God forbid we should ever forget, the impressions that we had so lately, first of the terrors impending over us, then of the felicity of their sudden dispersion.

It is true, we are not yet perfectly *whole*. Far from it, Heaven knows. But what would we have given once for so happy an approach towards it as we now possess? Our domestic foes are fallen in battle, or cut off by justice, or driven into other lands, or absconding in corners of their own, impoverished and disarmed, and taught by experience neither to rely on themselves nor their faithless allies. Our soldiery
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* Psal. ii. 11.

have recovered their ancient courage and character. The nation in general hath united in active loyalty; we are known and trusted one by another; known and dreaded by our adversaries, who had strangely mistaken our intestine divisions, bad as they were, for something much worse. Our distemper is at least expelled from our vitals, and driven to the extreme parts. We have notice, we have time, to provide against a return of it; and possibly at present *France* may be feeling from us, in her own dominions, a small share of the sufferings which she projected for ours, while we are enjoying in peace all that we feared to lose. Whatever we may want, therefore, to make our happiness complete, we ought to be most deeply sensible, that our portion of it is remarkably large; so large, that there is not surely a nation upon earth, with which any one of us, in the midst of all that we have to complain of and lament, would be willing on the whole to change conditions.

But then, as often as we consider to how comfortable a degree we are *whole*, we should always recollect by what means we were *made whole*. Our Saviour was not afraid the poor man, whom he had cured, should forget that he had regained the use of his limbs, but how he had regained it. And if he, who had been miraculously healed, yet had need of being reminded to whom he owed his health, much more should we, who have been saved by the ordinary methods of providence, be careful to fix it in our hearts whence the inestimable benefit was derived. And here let us allow their full proportion of praise, even to the human means; to the justice and mildness of his majesty's government, and the prospect of continued security and tranquillity under his descendants; blessings which the risk of losing excited the most vigorous efforts for preserving; to the valour, the prudence, the vigilance, the activity of his illustrious son; to the bravery and indignation thus inspired into his officers and troops; to the unexampled unanimity, zeal, and liberality of his faithful subjects, the nobility, the gentry, the clergy, the commonalty of the realm. Let us ever acknowledge our obligations to the merits of all these. But still let us remember, that men are only instruments in the hand of the Almighty. We have owned this all along by our prayers: let us own it sincerely

in our thanksgivings also ; and not receive, without suitable gratitude, what we begged with such uncommon earnestness. It is just as true at this hour as it was then, that *except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain**. From his displeasure came our danger, from his compassionate goodness our deliverance. *Therefore despise not either the chastenings or the mercies of the Almighty. For he maketh sore, and bindeth up; he woundeth, and his hands make whole*†. It cannot be less criminal towards God than men ; it is unspeakably more, to ask assistance, and when we have had it, not acknowledge it. He doth not indeed want our acknowledgments, but he hath still an equal right to them ; and that he requires them not for his own sake, but for ours, is surely no reason why we should withhold them.

But you will say, “ We do acknowledge God’s mercy in “ delivering us, and will never deny it.” But if after a while you never think of it more, you might almost as well deny it. Or if you think of it, and are not moved by it, that is worse than forgetting it. Or suppose you have ever so warm a feeling of his favours, yet if you refuse to make a proper return for them, this is worst of all. And what return doth he demand ? Some hard and unnatural, or expensive and ruinous service ? No : the most reasonable thing in itself, and the most beneficial to us and our fellow-creatures, that possibly can be : what the text expresses,

II. A firm resolution of virtuous obedience. *Behold, thou art made whole : sin no more.* God hath been gracious to you ; be dutiful to him. Sin is at all times equally absurd and ill-deserving. It is setting up our own perverse will against the authority of our Maker and Sovereign Lord ; our own passions and caprices against the wisdom of our heavenly Father ; thinking that we can prosper in opposition to the Almighty ; or if not, preferring rebellion and misery to fidelity and happiness. But to sin on, directly in the face of distinguishing mercies just vouchsafed, this is the most shocking aggravation of the worst thing in the world ; a crime so heinous, that perhaps you may resent being thought bad enough to need a caution against it. But the impotent man, whom
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* Psal. cxxvii. 2.

† Job v. 17, 18.

our Saviour healed, was not, that we know, a sinner beyond others : and, therefore, could we of these nations truly say, that we are not such neither, still the caution given him would be a seasonable one to us. We have at least sinned enough to deserve what we have suffered, which is more than a little. And had we deserved nothing farther, yet, as *Elibu* remarks in the case of *Job*, *Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more* *.

But to see how far such advice is necessary for us, it will be requisite not to keep in generals, but descend to particulars. And they must be such as relate to each of us in our private capacities : for I am not speaking now to bodies of men, or to single persons in high stations. May God bestow plentifully on all such, grace to consider what the warning, *sin no more*, directs them to, while we consider what it directs us to ! And I apprehend the present occasion calls upon us to avoid, for time to come, four kinds of sin especially : to disregard religion no more ; to misbehave towards our rulers no more ; to encourage party-disputes and contentions no more ; to indulge extravagant pleasures and amusements no more.

1. To disregard religion no more. Perhaps this is the nation upon earth where it is regarded the least (our neglect of God's worship in our churches, our families, our closets ; the impious talk, the infidel books, that abound every where, afford lamentable evidence of it), though we have confessedly the greatest blessings to incline us to be religious, and the most rational instruction how to be so. Notwithstanding this, who is there amongst us, of any age, who doth not perceive how much commoner and opener both indifference and profaneness are grown within his own time, within a small part of it ? Who was there amongst us lately, of any thought, that did not strongly fear we were become so entirely unconcerned about the matter, that even Popery would have had no terrors for us ? God be thanked it hath proved otherwise. And permit me to add, let them be thanked also, by whose long despised and reproached labours, a spirit of piety had still in some measure been kept alive : and by whose earnest and seasonable exhortations, an unexpected degree of Protestant zeal

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* Job xxxiv. 31.

was principally raised. Do us the justice then to bear it in mind, that you wanted our help, and you had it. The enemies of the government avowedly hate us for what we have done; if its friends will not love us for it, our case is hard indeed. But, however you think of us, learn at least to think of the religion we profess, as the truest support, indeed as an essential part, of our happy establishment. Not that preserving it for political purposes alone will be at all sufficient: they who aim at no more, will come short even of that. God will disappoint them, men will see through them, and infection will spread from hypocrisy, as well as profligateness, though not quite so fast, yet till at length the whole frame is corrupted and destroyed.

You may plead, that however profane the nation may be, we are answerable each for himself only. But indeed, so far as our behaviour can properly influence, we are answerable beyond ourselves. Do we then endeavour to discountenance irreligion, and encourage seriousness in those who belong to us, in those with whom we converse? Do we, as our Saviour hath enjoined us, *confess him before men**? Or do we not on many occasions outwardly appear *ashamed of him*, while inwardly our hearts condemn us for it?

But were we to answer for ourselves alone, what answer could we give? We are as good as others perhaps. And what if others be very bad? Will that excuse us from being what the word of God, and our own consciences, tell us we ought to be? If not, are we indeed such? Is concern for our future happiness, is reverence and love of God, the great principle within our breasts? Do we really love him the better for these very mercies, for which we are now met to praise him? We hope so perhaps. But what proof have we given of it, by serving him better since? And if none, while the motive was fresh upon our minds, what is to be expected afterwards, unless the present call awaken us, as heaven grant it may?

2. The next point of instruction is, to misbehave towards our rulers no more. The connexion is inseparable, *Fear God; honour the king*†. *For by him kings reign, and princes rule;*

* Matth. x. 32. Luke xii. 8.

† 1 Pet. ii. 17.

rule ; nobles, and all the judges of the earth *. For which reason we are to respect, not only the person of our sovereign, but, to use the apostle's words, *all that are in authority* †. For without a number of such, government cannot be administered. And professions of duty to him, with unjust bitterness against those whom he intrusts, and causeless opposition to the measures they advise, betray either gross insincerity, or pitiable weakness, or an impetuosity of temper, that should be better governed. This however doth not restrain those, to whose rank or office it belongs, from using the faithful, though possibly sometimes unpleasing, freedom of giving such counsel, or proposing such laws, as public-spirited prudence appears to direct. Nor doth it restrain any one from expressing, in a proper manner, his opinion of whatever public measures may considerably affect him, or the whole, provided he hath ground to think himself a judge of them. But it ought to restrain all persons from being vehement, and judging harshly, where perhaps they are unqualified to judge at all: from indulging such behaviour, such language, or even such notions, as are injurious to governors, or hurtful to the ends of government; as may excite or cherish disloyalty, or unreasonable dissatisfaction, or barely promote unconcernedness about those, whom providence hath set over us.

How far we have been guilty of these things, it is much fitter that each one should think seriously for himself, (for it is a very serious matter) than that any one should take upon him to tell others, especially from this place. I shall only say therefore, that every sort of person may have been guilty; some by wrong compliances, and abuse of power and favour; some by ill-founded complaints and resentments; all by disguising selfish views under plausible pretences. But whoever the criminals are, the crime is very great. Not only those in authority suffer by it, when they ought not, which alone is grievous injustice, but the community in general suffers deeply with them. The wrong things of this kind, which are said and done, give the ill-designing dreadful advantages against their superiors; and hurry the inconsiderate, even they who mean well, into wildnesses almost incredible. Nay,
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* Prov. viii. 15, 16.

† 1 Tim. ii. 1.

the wife and good are insensibly cooled and alienated by them. And then is the juncture for attempting to overturn a constitution. We have felt this, and therefore we shall be inexcusable, unless we remember it; remember to *abstain from all appearance** of undutifulness; to *keep our mouths with a bridle, while the wicked or the weak are before us*†; on no occasion to expect more from our rulers, than we justly may from human creatures like ourselves; to bear it patiently, if our most equitable expectations are not always answered; and *accept* and acknowledge *every worthy deed they do*, and surely they have done many, *with all thankfulness*‡. Acting thus, very probably, might have prevented the late rebellion, and may prevent another.

3. A further caution, closely connected with the preceding, is, to encourage party contentions no more. For they always break in, and usually to a high degree, be it ever so undesigned at first, on the respect owing to our governors. Or could that be avoided, one side will be tempted to patronise, for the sake of popularity, what they know, or easily might know, is wrong; to oppose what is useful, or even necessary; to construe the worthiest and wisest conduct unfairly; to prefer the support of their cause before the service of the public; to imagine or pretend, that the prevalence of it will produce every desirable effect; when both reason and experience demonstrate, that little, if any, good is like to follow from it, and possibly much harm. The other side, in return, are tempted to reject what they ought to forward; to insist on what they ought to give up; to oppress their adversaries by superior power; to accuse them of being what they are not, till perhaps they provoke them into being what they would not be. And on both sides these disputes engage men's principal attention, to the neglect of their common welfare; drive them into doing bad actions, and countenancing bad persons; make foreign friends afraid to rely upon us; and both foreign and domestic enemies bold to enterprize against us. Their late enterprize was chiefly founded on our divisions; which neither they, nor indeed we, could have imagined would have suffered us to unite against them so soon,
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* 1 Theff. v. 22.

† Psal. xxxix. 1.

‡ Acts xxiv. 2, 3.

and so heartily, as we did. God be praised, who inclined our hearts to it : but let us *sin no more*. Each party sees, that the other have sinned ; each might see, that they have sinned themselves : both must see that the event was nearly pernicious ; let us take warning for the future.

But it will be of small advantage not to oppose one another, if we all agree in behaving amiss ; and therefore,

4. The last caution is, to indulge extravagant pleasures and amusements no more. It is but too visible, how much, living entirely to trifles and follies, hath encreased in the upper part of the world ; and madness for diversions and entertainments, even in the middle and lower ; together with most profligate intemperance and debauchery in the lowest of all. Now vicious indulgencies are destructive to our temporal, as well as our spiritual interests ; to the health and strength, that should labour and defend the public ; to the honesty and regularity, that should secure private peace and comfort. Merely imprudent gratifications, by devouring time and money, as they do beyond imagination, destroy industry, and propagate poverty ; which, we must be sensible, is making yearly frightful advances upon us. And when wickedness is instigated by necessity, the worst of consequences may justly be apprehended. Those of mean rank are then fully ripe for any mischief : and what mischief might we not have dreaded from them ten months ago, had providence permitted the rebels to reach our capital ? Persons of better condition, when distressed, will too often sacrifice every other consideration to the urgent one of supplying their wants, real or fancied ; prefer their own present profit, sometimes a trifling profit, before the common safety ; heighten groundless discontents, to take advantage of them ; nay, join in rebellion itself against their consciences, of which we have lately had a most remarkable example, and ingenuous confession *. May it prove an useful preventive !

A further great evil is, that immoderate lovers of pleasure will of course favour the vilest wretches who contribute to their entertainment, and too frequently depreciate the worth

thief

* See Foster's account of the behaviour of the late Earl of Kilmarnock, after his sentence, p. 6, 7, 10, 11, 41.

thieft character, if it be a grave one ; whence proceed inconveniences without number. But were this despicable inclination hurtful no otherwise, it would be extremely so, by taking off the mind from application to things of moment. Even in persons the least considerable, indolence and inattention to their proper business, may have extensive bad effects : and when it grows general among such, it sensibly impoverishes and weakens, and tends to ruin a nation. But they who are intrusted with matters of importance, may, not only by a series of neglect, but by the ill-timed indulgence of an idle humour for a day or an hour, cause irretrievable mischief to a society, that hath purchased and depends on their best vigilance and industry ; which therefore are due to it, not only in point of honour, but of indispensable moral obligation in the sight of God.

These, I apprehend, are the chief particulars in which we should learn, from being made whole, to sin no more. And every one should apply them to examine and direct himself, not to inveigh against others ; and remember, that the utmost punctuality and zeal, in some parts of his duty, will not be accepted as an atonement for transgressing or overlooking any of the rest.

III. The last general head comprehended in the advice of the text, is, a prudent consideration of what may follow, if we disregard it : *Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.* Perhaps we may think that nothing worse can come. And so, perhaps, thought the poor man, to whom this was said first ; for his illness had been a very deplorable one. Yet our Saviour gave him the warning ; and let us take it also. Whoever goes on to offend, after receiving signal mercies, is plainly a greater sinner ; and let him not doubt but God can send him a heavier punishment, even in this world, and make *his last state worse than the first* *. Indeed, should only what we have already felt return upon us, the tenderness of a wounded part will augment both the fear and the pain. And how little probability of it soever we discern, as one dreadful danger hath grown up out of nothing, so may a dreadfuller of the same nature. Our sins, if we amend not,

will

will enfeeble and divide us yet more : our intestine foes may take new courage ; our foreign ones may support them better ; God may refuse entirely *to go forth with our hosts* * ; and any thing may have any effect that he pleases. Hitherto we have only been washed by the waves ; the next time we may sink under them ; that surely would be worse. And they who have now suffered so much from us, would with reason become vastly more formidable to us, were they to succeed hereafter, than if they had succeeded lately.

But where is the impossibility, that without the help of enemies at home, the powerful and inveterate one which we have abroad, may enslave us ere long immediately to itself ; and that without granting even the short reprieve to our religion, liberties, and properties, which perhaps from the former we might hope ? Our only defence against both is in God's good providence ; and our only ground of trust in that is, if we *sin no more*. For fresh provocations, it must be expected, will bring on severer judgments. Let us often recollect then, that he, who hath delivered us out of the hand of our enemies, can full as easily deliver us into it ; and if he doth not, still hath us continually in his own. Every thing terrible, fire, famine, pestilence, waits on his orders. At this instant we are suffering heavily by the last, though hitherto confined to our cattle : but how much longer and more general a ravage it may make amongst them, or to what other species of creatures it may extend at length, and whether not to our own, which of us can say ?

But indeed, without any other scourge at all, sin alone, by the natural consequences which Heaven hath originally annexed to it, is able to ruin us very completely. Contempt of God, and our duty may overturn on a sudden, but must undermine gradually, in proportion as it prevails, every blessing that we enjoy ; fill every family with disorders and distresses ; abolish mutual faith and confidence ; open a wide door to fraud and force ; defeat the execution of justice ; make our envied constitution ineffectual to its great ends, and turn all the good of it into evil ; *till we are able to bear*, as was the

ancient complaint in like circumstances, *neither our diseases, nor their remedies* *. The more immorality spreads, the deeper root it strikes; the difficulties of checking it increase; the numbers and vigour of those who endeavour to check it lessen. Some distempers, by the fermentation which they excite, work their own cure: but wickedness is a gangrene, which destroys the part it seizes; and, if it approaches towards being universal, must end in death. External force, like an acute disease, though for a time it bears down all before it, may still, by the vigour of nature, be thrown off unexpectedly; but an internal principle of dissolution, that hath corrupted the whole mass of humours, admits no relief.

Or suppose a sinful nation, either by stopping short of the extremity of sin, or by an uncommon delay of divine justice, neither of which can reasonably be expected, were to escape temporal ruin ever so long, yet there will be *a worse, an infinitely worse thing, come* without fail, and that very soon, to every sinner in it, the final vengeance of God in the next life; which will be, as it ought, peculiarly severe on those who *despise the riches of his forbearance and long-suffering; and will not know, that his goodness leads them to repentance* †.

I am very sensible, that this may appear a comfortless, an intimidating manner of speaking to you, and exceedingly unsuitable to so joyful a solemnity as the present. But why then will not all who hear me, why will not this whole land resolve on that amendment, without which no true comfort can be administered to them? Relieve us then from the necessity, for we must deal faithfully with you, of saying on thanksgivings just the same terrifying things that we do on fasts. It would afford us the highest delight to omit them on both; to set before you only pleasing views, and describe your condition in the language of the Psalmist: *Happy are the people who are in such a case; yea, blessed are the people who have the Lord for their God* ‡. It is entirely your own fault that motives of fear are ever mentioned to you. Our gracious Maker hath furnished us plentifully with a much better ground of obedience, by the numerous mercies which

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* Liv. Hist. Praef.

† Rom. ii. 4.

‡ Psal. cxliv. 15.

we have long enjoyed, and still continue to enjoy. Think but a little of the natural advantages of this island; of the civil, the spiritual privileges that have distinguished it for ages, and what requitals they deserve: think but how complicated a blessing this last deliverance is; and labour to be induced, as much as you can, by the bounties of God to serve him. But let us be conscious also, that our imperfection, our depravity, needs awe, as well as love, to move us; and use the joint efforts of both, to produce in our souls that filial sorrow, and penitent return to duty, which will prove the inlet, and is the only one, to all manner of consolation.

They that thus sow in tears, are entitled to reap in joy : their mouth may be filled with laughter, and their tongue with singing† : they may with propriety not only give, as they are bound, the more serious demonstrations of pious gratitude, but indulge every lighter expression of a cheerful heart, that innocence and prudence allow. Outward rejoicings for mercies, without inward concern for unworthiness, and fixed resolution of virtuous improvement, is an absurd and insolent, and will be a short-lived triumph. Praise is not seemly in the mouth of a sinner; for it was not sent him of the Lord‡. But when humble and hearty devotion hath preceded, gladness and exultation, kept clear of excess and riot, may and should follow on occasions like this. The grief of our offences should be lost, for the time, in a thankful sense of God's goodness; a cheering hope be entertained, that he, who hath delivered, will deliver§; and our behaviour shew to all around us what our hearts feel. This was the direction immediately given to the Jews, when once they had been made sensible of their transgressions, in their public assembly for a thanksgiving, on their return from the captivity: and I conclude with reciting it. The Levites read in the book, in the law of God, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading. And all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law. Then Nehemiah the governor, and Ezra the priest, and the Levites, that taught the people, said unto them, This day is holy unto the Lord your God: mourn not, nor weep. Go your way,*

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eat

* Psal. cxxvi. 6. † Ver. 2. ‡ Eccus. xv. 9. § 2 Cor. i. 10.

*eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them, for whom nothing is prepared ; for this day is holy unto our Lord : neither be ye sorry, for the joy of the Lord is your strength. And all the people went their way, to eat and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth ; because they had understood the words, that were declared unto them *.*

* Neh. viii. 7, 8, 9, 10, 12.

SER-

S E R M O N CXXIV.

(Preached on a General Fast.)

WHEREIN PUBLIC HAPPINESS CONSISTS;—HOW WE ARE TO
EXPRESS OUR REGARD OF IT;—AND THE ADVANTAGES
WHICH FLOW FROM THIS EXPRESSION.

PSALM cxxii. 6.

*O pray for the peace of Jerufalem: They ſhall prosper that
love thee.*

GOD hath planted in the hearts of men, and it is a ſtrong proof of his goodneſs to us, a principle of tender mutual benevolence, which reaſon enjoins us to exert on all occaſions; and revelation both threatens our tranſgreſſion of this rule with the ſevereſt puniſhments, and encourages our obſervance of it by promiſes of the moſt effectual aſſiſtance and nobleſt rewards. But as all mankind is an object too large for the generality of perſons to embrace in their affections, and for the reſt to think of actually benefiting; the ſcripture hath very juſtly appropriated our *love* to *our neighbour*; to every one who is any way brought near enough to us, to be capable of receiving any ſervice or mark of kindneſs from us, according to our Saviour's moſt rational explication of that term*. And each nation of the world being only a more extenſive neighbourhood of perſons combined together, under one head, for common advantage, the views of the ſeveral members of it may well reach thus far, but ordinarily ſcarce farther. And
therefore

* Luke x. 29, &c.

therefore love to our country hath been ever considered, not merely as an important and excellent virtue, which it always is, when genuine and judicious ; but as filling the whole compass of reciprocal duty, which it usually doth, provided we proportion it rightly to the various relations, which we bear to each person in the society. Now this is the affection, which the psalmist so warmly recommends in the text : *Peace* being well known to signify, in holy writ, all sorts of prosperity ; and *Jerusalem* being the centre of unity of the *Jewish* people, both in religious affairs and civil. *For thither the tribes went up, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord ; and there was the seat of judgment, even the seat of the house of David* *.

During the latter part indeed of the time, that their government subsisted, they had most of them a zeal for their country, which excluded charity towards the rest of mankind. But this was a corruption, not a precept of their religion. For no law of any other nation ever enjoined so strictly both justice and mercy to strangers as theirs ; though it did provide against needless intercourse with them, to prevent imitation of their evil customs. It is true, they were commanded to extirpate the inhabitants of *Canaan*. But these were grown to such a height of monstrous idolatry, unnatural lusts, and shocking barbarities, as the wisdom of God saw to be incurable. And he chose the *Israelites* for *his ministers, revengers to execute wrath upon them* †, that they might learn to abhor what they had been employed to punish. This done, their commission expired ; for it reached to no other nation. And in fact, they were as quiet neighbours to the Heathen round them, and as dutiful subjects to their *Chaldean, Persian* and *Grecian* masters, as any other people. Nor did the text more plainly require them to *pray for the peace of Jerusalem*, than the prophet *Jeremiah* doth, *to seek the peace of the city, whither they were carried captives, and pray unto the Lord for it* ‡.

We need not therefore scruple to imbibe love of our country from the sacred writings of the *Jews* ; and much less have we cause to imagine, as some would persuade us, that this is a virtue not prescribed to Christians. It is true, that as the *Romans* had long been ravaging the world, and the *Jews* in our Saviour's days were evidently ruining themselves ; both

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* Psa. cxii. 4, 5.

† Rom. xiii. 4.

‡ Jer. xxix. 7.

of them prompted to what they did by a narrow-minded and unjust vehemence for their national interest and honour: he earnestly recommended, as it was necessary, not the particular passion, of which they had already too much; but the general disposition, which they wanted, of good will to all men. For that is the only sure foundation of social behaviour; and while it restrains persons effectually from doing any thing wrong in favour of their country, will incite them powerfully to do every thing right. In teaching this doctrine therefore, and indeed throughout his whole conduct, he shewed the kindest and wisest regard to his undeserving fellow citizens; for whom, ill as he was treated by them, he fully appears to have had the most affectionate concern. Witness his tears and pathetic expostulations: *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee: how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not* *. *If thou hadst known, or as it rather should be translated, O that thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things, which belong unto thy peace* †. Witness again his peremptory command, even after he had been crucified there, *that repentance and remission of sin should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem* ‡. The same heroic sympathy his great apostle *St. Paul* expresses, after the severest usage, in the strongest manner, *for his brethren, his kinsmen, according to the flesh*, declaring solemnly before *Christ and the Holy Ghost*, *that he had great and continual sorrow and heaviness in his heart on their account* §. He hath not indeed exhorted the Christians, whom he favoured with his epistles, to the love of their several countries: for they were all under one dominion, and designed by providence to remain so. He hath not exhorted magistrates to study the welfare of those, over whom they presided; for there were no believing magistrates; and it might have been deemed presumptuous, and ill intended, if he had laid down directions for others; or foretold explicitly so soon, that the gospel would come to have authority on its side. But he hath sufficiently, though obliquely, intimated to rulers, what their office requires of them; and urged private

* Matt. xxiii. 37.

† Luke xix. 41, 42.

‡ Luke xxiv. 47.

§ Rom. ix. 1, 2, 3.

private subjects most convincingly and awfully to such behaviour, as will render communities quiet and flourishing.

Love of our country therefore is an undoubted Christian duty. And we shall both be directed and encouraged in the performance of it, if we consider, as the text leads us,

I. Wherein the public welfare consists.

II. How we are to express our regard to it.

III. What advantages will flow from expressing it as we ought.

I. Wherein it consists. Now plainly the happiness of any society is that which the persons who compose it, do or may enjoy in it. And therefore wide extent of dominion contributes nothing to the happiness of a state; for such unweildy bodies are seldom or never kept long in good health. Much less is military glory the point to be had in view, any farther than is needful to secure a peaceable possession of all important national rights. For such a purpose, war is lawful; and they who hazard their lives in it, worthy of high honour. But in all cases it is accompanied with dreadful evils; of which we are apt to consider the heavy expence, as if it were the only one; and forget the sufferings, and miserable deaths, of such multitudes of human creatures, though every one of them is a murder, committed by the authors of this calamity; besides the innumerable distresses of relations and friends, the devastations, inhumanities, and wickednesses of every kind, which never fail to be its attendants. Then if the event of all should turn, as God grant it always may, to the disadvantage of the aggressors, here is much mischief brought on their neighbours, only to bring more on themselves. Or suppose their success be ever so great, the injury done by them will be great in proportion: they will receive little real good from it, and have paid very dear for that, even in this world; and in another, God will take effectual care, that no one shall have cause to rejoice in having broken his laws, and used his creatures ill.

The next pre-eminence commonly imagined to constitute the prosperity of a state, is that of wealth, and its usual source, commerce. Now, undoubtedly riches are a valuable instrument, both of common defence, and separate enjoyment: but then they are also a dangerous incentive to luxury and debauchery;

bauchery ; by which persons grievously distress themselves, their families, their acquaintance, the public, in many ways, alas ! but too well known. And many, whom affluence doth not immediately seduce into gross vices, it leads, however, to indolence and ignorance, to the admiration of trifles and follies, and thence to the neglect, and afterwards the contempt and ridicule, of virtuous and prudent conduct. This wrong taste being once formed, high honours and pompous appearances are thought necessary by some ; the idlest gratifications and vanities by others ; the means to procure and support them must be found ; and when their incomes fail, as the largest, with such management, will fail, they must supply the defect by any baseness or iniquity that they can ; at least any such as general practice, in a time of general corruption, makes a shift to keep in tolerable countenance. This example in the upper part of the world, is followed of course by the lower ; their industry lessens, their expences increase, their principles are depraved, they and their families ruined ; they seek for relief in fraud, violence, or intemperance, and plunge themselves by each deeper in misery. Even of the regular and diligent, the home labour is much of it employed on things useless or hurtful ; the foreign trade in importing superfluities. This procedure must as necessarily impoverish the public, as it must any single person, or number of persons ; for the whole number of them is the public. And in such circumstances, whatever present shew of strength and plenty there may be, is fallacious ; like the over-full and florid look of a diseased body, caused by a too indulgent regimen ; and under the superficial appearance of redundant health, betraying to the skilful evident symptoms of the most fatal distempers, already begun, if not far advanced.

Another thing, constantly and justly mentioned as a main ingredient in political happiness, is liberty ; an invaluable privilege, but often misunderstood, and still oftener abused. Absolute liberty, to do what we will, is absolute power. If one alone, or a few, have this, the rest are in slavery ; if all have it, the whole must be in confusion. Liberty, therefore, in order to preserve it, must be restrained by law, in whatever cases the exercise of it may affect others. And regulations by authority are necessary, not only to prevent mutual

encroachments, but to ascertain each person's claims and expectations ; and to instruct every one what he is to do, and what to avoid, for the common benefit. Now, legal provisions for these ends ought to be just and equitable, suited to the state of things known and fixed. And those which a nation makes for itself by its chosen representatives, are so very much the most likely to have these properties, that living as we do, under a constitution purposely contrived for making, on every occasion, such as we want, is the greatest of civil blessings, provided we turn it not, by our fault, into a curse.

But to prevent this, besides care and impartiality in framing laws, there must be a general observation of them, else they were enacted in vain. Even such as are in their nature the most variable, must be observed while they last. For not only the total neglect of them will frustrate their beneficial intent, and open a door to yet worse irregularities, but the partial, besides having this unhappy effect in its degree, will introduce a very dangerous kind of inequality : good subjects must be losers by their obedience, and bad ones gainers by their transgression.

Still more essentially doth the common welfare consist in the practice of such rules of conduct as are in themselves, and therefore always obligatory : in abstaining from violence, fraud, promiscuous lewdness, intemperance, extravagance ; in performing carefully the proper business of our several stations ; in providing diligently what is needful for ourselves, and those who belong to us ; in relieving the poor with prudent bounty ; in behaving with respect to superiors, with condescension to inferiors, with friendliness to equals, with peculiar affection to those whom either nature or voluntary ties have united to us more closely. These are the main things on which social happiness depends. A nation may be small, and weak, and poor, and yet the persons who compose it may enjoy their beings very comfortably. But however great, and powerful, and rich it is, folly and wickedness will bring misery on each particular ; which, put together, is general misery ; and will besides gradually weaken and dissolve the whole. For the principal supports of a state confessedly are, the numbers, and health, and strength, and industry, and

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probity,

probity, and concord, of the several members of it; all which good morals promote, and bad undermine.

But as human laws, in multitudes of instances, cannot punish, and much less prevent, the breach of moral obligations, the chief security of regard to them, in any society, must proceed from reverence of the divine laws. And as the precepts of Christianity are vastly more determinate, accompanied with communications of far greater moral powers, and enforced by sanctions of unspeakably stronger terror to sinners, and sweeter consolation to pious minds, than the dictates of nature, unassisted by revelation, establishing a practical belief of the gospel, is securing and completing the provision for national felicity. This will, in all cases, restrain men from what is wrong, animate them in what is right, make them easy and happy under every suffering. Besides, profession of the same faith and hope, and participation of the same worship and sacraments, must give so peculiar a sacredness and endearment to the bonds of civil union, that zeal in the common cause of our country and our religion, at once, will be intrepidly active, and indefatigably persevering*. *For my brethren and companions sakes, I will wish thee prosperity; yea, because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek to do thee good*†. Then to all the advantages flowing naturally from piety, we cannot doubt but God will superadd his blessing, and withhold it from the profane; for his own words are, *Them that honour me, I will honour; and they that despise me, shall be lightly esteemed*‡. Nor must a further consideration ever be omitted, for it is a very important one; that unless true religion be cherished and practised, false religion will insinuate itself and prevail. For the mind of man must have some, as the experience of all ages proves, and our own particularly; amongst whom the increase of infidelity is accompanied with that of Popery; an evil which ought to be highly formidable to us; as it must of course, if ever it gain power enough, not only overturn our present happy establishment, but introduce the cruellest tyranny over the souls, and bodies, and estates of men.

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* Dion. Halic. Ant. Rom. l. ii. c. 23.

† Psal. cxxii. 8, 9.

‡ 1 Sam. ii. 30.

Having now seen wherein the public welfare consists, we should all with great seriousness consider

II. How we are to express our regard to it. The manner prescribed in the text, according to our translation, is, *Praying for the peace of Jerusalem*; according to others, Asking or inquiring concerning its peace. Both imply having it much at heart. And whatever we have deservedly at heart, ought jointly to engage our watchful solicitude, and our earnest petitions. I shall now begin with the first.

Pretences to public spirit, if they are not sincere, usually cover hurtful designs. Therefore we should examine ourselves closely, for self-deceit is wonderfully frequent, *of what spirit we indeed are**: whether private passions or interests, concealed under specious appearances, do not influence our discourse and behaviour, perhaps our very thoughts. And, so far as we have need to know, we should make the same inquiry concerning others also; forming our opinions of them with charity, yet with caution. But supposing the common good be ever so really our object and theirs, unless we understand well the tendencies of things, we may do it irreparable harm, instead of furthering it; and therefore should always be, according to St. James's admirable direction, *swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath*†: impartially diligent to learn the truth, where it is our business to judge and act; backward to meddle where it is not; reasonable and moderate in all matters. But let us consider our duty more distinctly, in relation to the several articles that were specified under the preceding head.

As defence against enemies is an essential ingredient in public happiness, rulers are bound to provide for it with vigilance, and subjects to contribute to it with cheerfulness; far from repining at necessary burdens, though heavy ones. But we ought to oppose with double vigour, from principle as well as interest, the deliberate, and habitual, and perfidious, and insolent disturbers of mankind; yet always remembering, that the only lawful aim, even in the justest war, is an equitable conclusion of it. *The Lord give strength unto his people; the Lord give his people the blessing of peace*‡!

Again;

* Luke ix. 55.

† James i. 19.

‡ Psal. xxix. 10.

Again: as national wealth, and private plenty of the conveniences of life, are desirable in communities, but luxury and extravagance destructive to them, all persons, in their stations, ought so to promote the former, as to discourage the latter at the same time; which they will do most successfully, by setting examples to others of decent frugality, and attention to their own affairs; by honouring worthy characters, though in mean circumstances; and expressing, in every proper way, dislike and contempt of baseness, debauchery, profusion, admiration of undeserving things, neglect of important ones; be they, who are guilty of such faults, ever so distinguished by their rank or accomplishments.

Further: as liberty is a blessing of inestimable value in society, it ought to be asserted with the utmost resolution and watchfulness, not only against open assaults, but every practice, that may secretly and silently impair it; yet with religious care, neither to *use* it, nor unwarily assist others to *use* it, *for a cloak of maliciousness**; nor hazard the destruction of it, by attempts of improving it to a visionary perfection. Therefore power, in a requisite degree, must both be allowed and diligently supported: They, in whose hands it is placed, must both be obeyed and humbly respected, *not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake*†; even the subordinate, much more the supreme; their whole conduct must be viewed with modesty and candour; their good actions and intentions acknowledged with due thankfulness; their mistakes and failings, imagined or real, borne with that mildness, of which we have all need to excuse our own. And the same equitable temper should always be preserved between private persons, one towards another; were their differences about public affairs of ever such moment, whereas they are frequently nominal or trifling; and were they ever so sure of being in the right, whereas possibly both of them have reason to distrust it. This is the method, and it is the only one, by which we can ever hope to see *Jerusalem built as a city, that is at unity in itself*‡.

Further yet: as good laws, and the observation of them, are necessary to the public welfare; all, who have a share in
legislature,

* 1 Pet. ii. 16.

† Rom. xiii. 5.

‡ Psal. cxxii. 3.

legislature, ought to contrive or assent to such, and oppose others, without suffering any consideration to bias them; all magistrates ought to execute them with uprightness and courage, yet with humanity; and all subjects, to obey them disinterestedly, and procure obedience to them zealously.

But the laws of morality require peculiar attention for our country's good, as well as our own. Every person, who transgresses these, *teaches* his neighbour, *teaches* his family, *an evil lesson against himself**, in points of the greatest consequence. And every government, which connives at such transgressions, when it can safely punish them, connives at the ruin of the people intrusted to its care. But especially every free government, guilty of so culpable remissness, be it to court popularity, be it to serve what present turn it will, undermines the only ground it hath to stand upon. For without virtue, liberty cannot subsist.

Nor indeed without piety can virtue subsist. For our good affections are so weak, our bad inclinations so vehement, and the temptations of the world so numerous and enticing, that we need every possible preservative. And evidently the fear of God is the most awful restraint from doing ill: and the love of God the most delightful inducement to do well. True religion therefore must be established by the authority of the legislature, but with the tenderest regard to scrupulous consciences; and upheld in reputation by the countenance and example of the great. Its ministers must be industrious, and their superiors must see that they are, in teaching and defending it, and adorning their doctrine by respectable and amiable behaviour. Its professors must be assiduous attendants on its exercises in the congregation, and serious practisers of its injunctions at home.

But particularly, in both places, they must be earnest with God for their country's prosperity, and fervently *pray for the peace of Jerusalem*. Many can do little else; but all can do so much for it. In some of our endeavours to serve the public we may err; in this we are sure to be right. Often we know not, what is best for it; our heavenly Father always doth. Possibly in times of difficulty and danger we may be tempted

* Eccles ix, 1.

tempted to despair of the commonwealth ; praying for it will remind us, that its fate is not in the hands of men, but of the Almighty. In all times, resentments, interests, prejudices, frequently blind and mislead us ; devout applications to heaven will compose our passions, purify our intentions, obtain us light to guide our steps, and enlarge our views. Perhaps we have been diligent enough, or more than enough, in the use of other means, conducive, as we imagined, to public good ; but have never, humbly and heartily, used this. And yet, if we believe a righteous Judge of the world, we must surely believe, that he takes notice of the addresses, which his poor creatures, with pious affections, offer up to him. Or could we doubt it otherwise, we are fully assured of it in his sacred word. Not that naming our wants informs him, or acts of servile submission delight him, or unfit importunities prevail on him ; but that praying *in spirit and in truths* *, while it seems intended to influence him only, hath a powerful influence on us ; and by strengthening the sense it expresses, how dependent we are on his mercy, and what qualifications are needful to obtain it, fits us at the same time to receive it, and grow better by it ; whereas bestowing his favours on those, who are too negligent of him to ask for them, might neither be suitable to the holiness of his nature, and the honour of his government, nor indeed contribute to their final advantage. Why then should not we address ourselves to the Lord of all, not in outward form only, but inward reality ; not merely at distant seasons appointed for it, like this, but every day of our lives ; that he would graciously protect the community, of which we are members, and instruct and excite us to perform properly our duty towards it ? His own declaration, even after he had promised a blessing, is, *I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them* †. And the direction of his prophet is, *Ye, that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth* ‡.

Affectionate vigilance therefore to do each his part for the service of the whole, and constant prayer, that God would *prosper the united works of his hand* §, are the genuine demonstrations

* John iv. 23.

† Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

‡ Is lxii. 6, 7.

§ Psal. xc. 17.

monstrations of that regard, which we owe to the public welfare. Let us now consider,

III. What advantages will flow from expressing it in this due manner. *They shall prosper that love thee.* Worldly prosperity is designed to partake of the uncertainty of all worldly things; but, so far as any thing on one part can secure it, a virtuous and pious public spirit must. Princes, magistrates, teachers of religion, military men, private persons of all ranks and professions, who thus express the love of their country, will be loved by it, and love one another. Such union will give them both the highest pleasure, and the greatest possible strength: nothing will be done to betray or thwart the general interest, but every thing imaginable to promote it: they will be bold in dangers, persevere through difficulties, furnish mutual assistance at any hazard: allies will know they can trust them; enemies will respect and dread them. Indeed they will have no enemies, but such as oppose truth and right; and therefore, when they are driven to war, they will consider themselves as fighting the battles of God. But usually they will enjoy peace, at home as well as abroad, and taste the comforts of it without alloy; each delighting in the other's good; each feeling the tranquillity, the wealth, the honour of the community, as his own; and rejoicing with humble thankfulness, that his share in the production of it hath not been wanting. If such happiness be seldom seen, the reason is, that such dispositions towards it are seldom general. But let them be ever so uncommon, and affairs for want of them ever so unprosperous: whoever sacredly preserves them in himself, and faithfully exerts them when he can, *his soul shall prosper*, as St. *John* expresses it*: be filled with the consolation, that he hath meant and endeavoured well, though surrounded with examples and temptations to the contrary; and that none of the calamities, that have happened, or may happen, can be laid to his charge. Were he to be entirely deserted by other men, he would support himself by our Saviour's reflection: *Behold, the hour cometh, yea is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the*
Father

* 3 John, ver. 2.

Father is with me *. Some, however, in the worst of times, will probably bear witness to him on earth; but God will certainly look down upon him with approbation from heaven, and bless him with a pleasing consciousness of his favour, the foretaste of future reward.

Let us now, on the other hand, contemplate the effects, I do not say of downright ill-will to the public, which few perhaps can be wicked enough to harbour knowingly, but of indifference, and preferring other considerations to its advantage. If persons, in stations of trust, supreme or subordinate, regard empire, absolute power, profit, pleasure, indolence, as their felicity; inferiors will in proportion be sacrificed, oppressed, exhausted, neglected. If these inferiors are principally intent on their own private gratifications of any kind; even where they have no share in the government, they will hurt it by serving it remissly or unfaithfully, and be miserable by unwilling subjection. But where the government is mixed, and divided between the sovereign, the nobles, and the representatives of the commonalty; as it cannot be carried on at all in that form, without professions, on every side, of a patriot side; so in the degree, in which these professions are false, there will be a wide door open for supine mismanagement, selfish projects, corruption, treachery; the vilest of men will shelter themselves under plausible appearances and favourite names, and be supported by parties, which they have artfully raised or caressed. At the same time, they, who think they have the tenderest love for their country, perhaps will find, on reflection, that in truth they love only the faction, in which they have listed; or though it be their country, if they have not had tenderness enough for it, to examine coolly what conduct its interests require, they may accelerate its ruin, by increasing the fierceness of contention, and lending the reputation of their good meaning to colour over the bad designs of others. Free nations therefore, as they are the happiest beyond comparison, if the general advantage be the general object; so they are peculiarly uncomfortable, and exposed to danger from within and without, if divisions inflame men

* John xvi. 32.

one against another, or the attention of each be confined to himself.

Still the *wise in their generation** may imagine, that however impossible it be for the whole to prosper without the mutual affection of the parts, they shall prosper the better for throwing off a principle, that will be always interfering with their interests or inclinations. But they cannot attempt to throw it off, or even contradict it in a single instance, without severely condemning themselves in their hours of recollection. Or if they could, they will be detected, in spite of all disguise, and abhorred by others, and most by the worthiest; which gives the hardest hearts much greater uneasiness, than they are willing to own. Besides, through the mercy of providence, their wicked schemes often fail of answering their ends; and first to do wrong, and then be disappointed of their aim in it, is double ignominy. Punishment also not uncommonly overtakes even the securest criminal. But supposing the selfish wretch to succeed, that success will tempt or provoke many more to imitate him in hurtful designs and unfair methods. If they act in opposition to him, he may suffer, as he deserves, by the example he hath set; if they act in conjunction with him, ere long somewhat will disunite them. Or however, bad precedents naturally produce worse, and so they multiply continually; till at last the authors and encouragers of mischief are in their turn involved in it. But were they to escape for life, yet their posterity, whose advancement perhaps is the main point, which they have in view, must partake, it may be largely, in whatever the commonwealth is brought to suffer; besides the hereditary disgrace of springing from such ancestors. And, if ill people of every rank would consider, what figures their predecessors in wickedness make now in daily talk, and are likely to make hereafter in history, if they be of consequence enough; and in how very different a light men of probity are seen, when the transient mists, that artifice, prepossession and resentment have raised, are dispersed; surely it must have a beneficial influence on their conduct.

Or,

* Luke xvi. 8.

Or, if none of these considerations can affect them, there is yet another of infinite moment. This life, at best, is short; and most of the busy actors on the stage of the world have probably but a small part of it to come, before a strict account of their behaviour in it is demanded. And will it be well for us then, think we, that, for the sake of purposes not to be owned, we have brought unjust reproach, uneasiness, distress on our brethren; and disquieted, weakened, impoverished, undone our common parent, whom nature and reason and revelation jointly require us to love and to serve? Or must it not be inexpressible happiness, for those in low stations to have discharged the duties of them with faithful affection, both to their rulers and their fellow-subjects; and for those in the highest to be able to say, with the excellent *Jewish* governor, *Think upon me, O my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people* *.

If these be solid motives, let us all be moved by them: first, to use the utmost caution, that we do no harm to our country; next to try, what service we can do it; but especially to endeavour, for that we every one of us can, by virtuous lives, united hearts, and fervent prayers, to call down the Divine Benediction on our national counsels and undertakings. If indeed we consider worldly appearances only, we have great cause to fear; if we reflect on our many heinous iniquities, we have still much greater cause. But when we call to mind, what deliverances God hath often and lately bestowed on us, what warnings and what time he hath given us to repent, how slow and unwilling he appears to let our enemies proceed to our total destruction, it cannot but kindle in our breasts a most reviving persuasion, indeed *a full assurance of hope* †, that would we but yet be unanimous and religious, we might yet by his blessing be safe and prosperous. And may *the Lord so bless us, that we may see Jerusalem in prosperity all our life long* ‡: *but let them be confounded and turned backward, as many as have evil will at Sion* §.

* Neh. v. 19.

† Heb. vi. 11.

‡ Psal. cxxviii. 6.

§ Psal. cxxix. 5.

S E R M O N CXXV.

(Preached *April 25. 1749*, on the Thanksgiving for the Peace.)

ON THE BLESSINGS OF PEACE.—THEY ARE THE GIFT OF
God.

PSALM XXIX. 10.

—*The Lord shall give his people the blessing of peace.*

WE are met this day to thank God for a mercy, that hath long been the object of our earnest wishes and solemn prayers; that we have often had but small hope of obtaining, and yet now have possessed many months with an increasing prospect of its continuance: on which account our joy is still more reasonable, though it must, from the constitution of our nature, be less warmly felt than it was at first. Accordingly we have just been expressing it in the divine presence. And instruction from this place was not previously necessary to excite our gratitude for a benefit so visible and so important. But it may contribute not a little to fix in our breasts a more durable sense of what we have acknowledged; and, which is the end of all, directs us to such behaviour as will secure and improve the happiness we enjoy.

I shall, therefore, at present,

I. Set before you the *blessing of peace.*

II. Shew you that it is the *gift of God.*

III. Press you to remember, that only *his people* are entitled to it; and, consequently, to consider whether we are such; and to labour that we may in the highest degree.

I. I shall

I. I shall set before you the *blessing of peace.*

Man appears, from the harmless make of his body, the conversable disposition of his mind, the tenderness of his affections, the sovereignty of his reflecting principle, the necessity of assistance in his numerous wants, and the rules of life prescribed him by express revelation, to be formed for a social inoffensive creature. Now, the natural state of each being is the happy one. And the happiness of peace is like that of health; it spreads through the whole of the civil, as that doth of the animal constitution; and furnishes vigour and pleasure to every part, without being distinctly perceived in one more than another; for which reason we are apt to overlook the felicity of both, till the loss of them for a time renews our sense of their value; and even such experience usually doth not long preserve it in our memory. Therefore, to discern sufficiently the advantages of peace, we must recollect the miseries of war.

To these we seldom attend farther than we immediately feel them. And the generality feel only the expence; which indeed is a fore evil, and hath been for many years past, and must be for many to come, a heavy burden to us. Persons of low degree are sadly straitened by it in their enjoyment of the common comforts and necessities of life. Their superiors, it is true, need only undergo a retrenchment of their superfluities; which they might bear, if they would, without much uneasiness, or any harm. But as too many of them are pleased to reckon their grandeur and luxury, their follies and their vices, the most inseparable privileges of their rank, they must, by retaining these, be distressed equally with others, when the demands of the state are larger than ordinary. And as their usual resource is the very bad one, of supplying a fund for extravagance and immorality, by refusing acts of piety, charity, and justice, they force multitudes round them to suffer with them and for them. Frequently, indeed, the load of taxes may not be the cause of this dishonourable behaviour; but even then it is a plausible pretence and excuse for it. Nor doth the mischief stop at particular persons; but the public, exhausted by payments, and sunk under debts, becomes incapable of exerting itself, even for its own preservation, when future occasions require.

Yet,

Yet, melancholy as these things are, an article much more shocking, and which ought to be the first in our thoughts, is that of the various and continual toils and hardships that must be endured by such numbers of poor creatures, exposing themselves in defence of others, through so long a course of time : the loss of so many thousands of lives by sickness and in battle ; the grief of so many relations and friends ; the miseries of so many destitute families ; part of these our fellow-subjects ; not a few of them possibly very dear to one or other of us ; a second part our allies ; the rest called indeed enemies ; but, it may be, scarce any of them in fault for that enmity, how much soever their rulers are ; and all of them, in truth, our brethren ; of the same blood, and, in essentials, the same faith, though taught them with a mixture of dangerous errors.

Further still : war not only weakens and afflicts a community in these respects, but interrupts the freedom of commerce, retards the propagation of knowledge, prevents useful improvements, takes of the public attention from domestic concerns, furnishes occasion for abuses, obstructs the remedy of inconveniencies, till they grow inveterate and hard to cure ; in short, disorders and unhinges the whole system of civil affairs. Then besides, which is a vastly more alarming consideration yet, all the time that hostilities last, who can tell how they may end ? And had ours ended, as they easily might, in our being absolutely overcome, and obliged to accept the victors terms, what would they have been ?

But war is also a state of no less wickedness than calamity and terror. Whenever it breaks out, one side, at least, must have acted grievously contrary to humanity and justice ; contrary too, in all likelihood, to solemn treaties ; and that from no better motives than little resentments, groundless or distant fears, eagerness of gaining unnecessary advantages, restless ambition, false glory, or wantonness of power. To such detestable idols are whole armies and nations deliberately sacrificed ; though every suffering, thus caused, is a heinous crime, and every death a murder. Nor will the side which at first is more innocent, fail in the progress to be guilty of many shocking transgressions in common with the other. The whole body of a people are apt to grow uncharitable, unpitying,

ing, implacable ; and the soldiery will plunge of course into cruelty, rapine, profaneness, lewdness, intemperance ; not to add, that when the poor wretches have once changed the ordinary employments of life for this, they will be in great danger of never settling honestly and soberly to them again. Some of these things, to worldly or inconsiderate minds, may appear small matters : but every benevolent, or merely prudent person, will esteem them very great ones ; and every pious heart will most seriously mourn, that *the worthy name, by which we are called, is blasphemed among the Gentiles**, through the sins, and peculiarly the enmities, of those who profess the gospel, instead of its producing that *glory to God, peace on earth, and good will amongst men*, whose angels proclaimed at our Saviour's birth †.

Still this dreadful evil, big with so many more, becomes, by the obstinate iniquity of men, sometimes unavoidable. It must be the will of the common Father of All, that societies, as well as single persons, be restrained from committing material injuries, else destructive ones would be committed perpetually. Now, certainly amicable methods are to be tried in the first place : but often the only effectual method of restraint is by arms ; and then *the minister of God*, the supreme power, *must not bear the sword in vain* †. Often again, treaties made to support allies, if unjustly attacked, are probable means of preserving peace ; and when that proves otherwise, the assistances promised must be given, in order to restore it. But above all, when a nation is directly attacked itself, defence is undeniably necessary. And our case, in the late war, was compounded of all these. We have therefore the comfort, that our undertaking it was justifiable ; and our manner of carrying it on, I trust, no way peculiarly blameable. But it could never be lawful to refuse any equitable, any tolerable conditions of agreement, for putting an end to so much guilt and misery. Whether those which we have accepted are desirable, is not a question to be discussed here. You have decided it for yourselves in the affirmative, by joining in this morning's service ; and the people in general have shewn their joyful concurrence in the same opinion. If some well-meaning

* James ii. 7. Rom. ii. 24.

† Luke ii. 34.

‡ Rom. xiii. 4.

meaning and able persons have thought otherwise, diversities of judgments are always to be expected in such matters ; and if the ill-wishers to our happy establishment are sorry and angry, we have the more reason to be glad. Let us therefore proceed to observe,

II. That the *blessing of peace* is *God's gift*.

This will need only a short proof ; but requires a much more serious and practical consideration, than we commonly allow it. Every enjoyment is from his bounty ; every suffering his infliction. The whole series of causes and effects, all the connections of all things, were originally appointed, and are continually superintended by him. He brings forth, in each generation, such persons to act according to their own free choice, their various parts on the theatre of life, as he foresees will answer, sometimes by their great abilities and good dispositions, sometimes by the contrary, his holy purposes of judgment or of mercy. And the influence of this one arrangement on the restoration of our present tranquillity, may have been, and probably hath been, unspeakably great. But be the tempers, qualifications, and designs of men what they will, he can, unperceived by themselves, put thoughts into their minds, to incite, withhold, divert them to another object, just as he pleases. Then, besides, the entire frame of inanimate nature, as it was produced, is also actuated by him ; and he could, by its original formation, or can now by the slightest change in the smallest part of it, occasion, obstruct, alter to any degree, the most important events. And lastly, the same wise and gracious motives, which induced him to make the world, must certainly induce him to be attentive to it. And the attention of an infinite mind must comprehend the regulation of every thing, even the smallest ; but affairs of such momentous consequence, as peace and war, cannot fail to occupy a distinguished place in the scheme of providence.

These deductions of reason, our condition of late years hath obliged me more than once to lay before you ; but still they need to be inculcated. Passages of scripture too, confirming them, I have produced to you in great numbers ; but it is very easy, and would to God it were not necessary, to add yet more. *I form the light, and create darkness ; I make peace,*

and create evil; I the Lord do all these things*. The heart of kings is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivulets of water: he turneth whithersoever he will†. The Lord is thy keeper, the Lord is thy defence upon thy right hand‡. And on the contrary, Shall there be evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it§?

Frequently indeed we perceive no marks of the interposition of God in what passes. But we are both inadvertent and short-sighted; ignorant, not only of the secret springs and material circumstances of many human actions, but yet more, beyond comparison, of principal purposes in the divine administration. Yet this however we know, that he is incessantly conducting the affairs of the present world, towards a full display of his wisdom, justice and goodness, in the next; though often by steps invisible to our eyes, and improbable to our imaginations. For his judgments are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out||. Therefore in all things we should believe a Providence; but in many we may see it: and very plainly in our own case, to whom true religion and liberty have been so wonderfully preserved, in the midst of such imminent dangers; and quiet and safety so unexpectedly restored, when *the help of man was* confessedly *vain*¶. Nor did God only bestow the blessing, but it is he who continues it; and every day's peace, as well as every day's bread, is a gift from him.

Surely then we have cause, not for joy alone, but thankfulness too, from the bottom of our hearts. And if we ungratefully disown, or negligently forget the author of our happiness, what is it likelier, what is it fitter he should do, than deprive us of it again? We may think, perhaps, that we have fully discharged our consciences towards him by attendance on the present solemnity. And God grant we may hear, it hath been every where universally attended. But supposing, that outward acknowledgments singly are downright pageantry and mockery. Nay, inward sense of obligation along with them, if it bring not forth suitable and lasting obedience, is imperfect, inefficacious, delusive homage, which our Maker cannot

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accept.

* Is. xlv. 7.

† Prov. xxi. 1.

‡ Psal. cxxi. 5.

§ Amos iii. 6.

|| Rom. xi. 33.

¶ Psal. cvjii. 12.

accept. *Herein is my Father glorified, saith our blessed Saviour, that ye bear much fruit* *. And thus we are to understand that awful denunciation : *If ye will not bear, and if you will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the Lord of hosts, I will send a curse upon you, and I will even curse your blessings* †. Accordingly the text very clearly intimates,

III. That to entitle ourselves to *the blessings of peace*, we must be *his people* ; own his authority by observing his laws.

The practice of religion and virtue makes nations industrious, frugal, rich, healthy, populous, unanimous, public-spirited, fearless ; yet at the same time, just, prudent, friendly ; which are the very qualities, that constitute them formidable enemies, desirable confederates, inoffensive neighbours ; and, so far as any thing can, will secure them peace. But wickedness impoverishes, enfeebles, dispirits, depopulates, disunites ; extinguishes concern for common good, inflames selfish appetites and passions ; renders men rash and provoking, yet indolent and despicable. It seems hardly needful for providence to interpose, otherwise than it hath done in the original appointment of things, to exalt a people of the former character, or depress one of the latter. But when it is, we may expect it to be done. For God will reward what he loves, punish what he hates. And though his recompences are neither perfect nor proportionable, they are real and considerable, even here. Experience hath found it : scripture hath foretold it. The *Jewish* nation indeed prospered or suffered, according to their doings, more constantly and equally than others. But still, not only *these things happened to them for our ensamples, and are written for our admonition* ‡ : but in the same ages, God visited the Heathen also for their iniquities ; and *lengthened their tranquillity, when they broke off their sins by righteousness* §. Christian states, we confess, as they were not in being, are not mentioned in the gospels or epistles ; but *Godliness hath the promise there of the life that now is, as well as that which is to come* || ; and the *Revelation* of St. *John*, a prophetic work, describes whole kingdoms, and yet larger portions

* John xv. 8.
§ Dan. iv. 27.

† Mal. ii. 2.
|| 1 Tim iv. 8.

‡ 1 Cor. x. 11.

portions of the earth, as undergoing the severest of temporal judgments, for the abominations which they had committed. We ought to be deeply affected therefore by every declaration of God's purposes in this respect throughout his word. And the sum of them is: *If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land. But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it* *.

Which then is our case? Are we God's people? Are we even sensible what that phrase implies? That we believe, not a presumptuous scheme of falsely-called rational religion, framed by our fancies, but the *mystery of the gospel* †: that we practise, not arbitrary system of polite morals, indulgently relaxed to fit easy upon our inclinations, but all those duties, in their genuine strictness, which *the grace of God, that bringeth salvation, came to teach; denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, living soberly, righteously and godly in this present world, and looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works* ‡. Do we know ourselves by this picture? Or is not the very different one, which I have so often been obliged to set before you, still our true resemblance? Are we not regardless in general, both of a present providence and of future rewards? Have not many of us cast off with scorn, and most of us contributed to loosen, those ties of faith and worship, which in every country else, and in this till of late, have always been held necessary, even to civil welfare? They, who have not rejected religion, do they not however, numbers of them, slight the exercises of it, wholly in private, and to a great degree in public? Nay, such as appear pretty regular in them, and seem to have a real sense of piety, have they any zeal for it, and sorrow for the decay of it? Do they not feel and express more dislike and contempt of those whom they think, and perhaps but think, *righteous overmuch* §, than of the most thoughtless about their spiritual state, not to say, the most abandoned?

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* Isa. i. 19, 20.

† Tit. ii. 11—14.

‡ Eph. vi. 19.

§ Eccl. vii. 16.

abandoned? Are we not in common life dissolute, expensive, negligent of our affairs, our families, our very children, at least in the most important point, their principles; overrun by an epidemic rage for hourly pleasures and amusements, with an utter contempt of consequences; which, after infecting almost universally the upper, and next to them the middle part of the world, is yearly spreading wider among those, whose parsimony and useful industry is the wealth of the nation? Are we not also in our political capacities, how irreconcilably forever we differ, lamentably alike; void of reverence to authority, subordinate or supreme; attentive chiefly, if not only, to selfish or party considerations, varnished over with transparent pretences of public good; vehement about disputable matters, unconcerned about confessedly necessary ones; each denomination, each order and rank, bitterly accusing the other, and none ever thinking in earnest to amend themselves; extremely afraid of hurting liberty by restraining wickedness, but not at all of being undone by indulging it; wonderfully jealous of the power of our own church, which hath and desires less, than ever any other in any age; but perfectly easy about the daily growth of Popery, the most tyrannical empire over soul and body that can be, and the most peculiarly formidable to this country? *My people is foolish, they have not known me; they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no understanding*.*

Can such a nation hope for the favour of providence? Could it flourish, even were there no Providence? Evidently it is impossible. Sentiments of religion and virtue are the seeds of all happiness, the security in all danger, the support in all affliction. These are decaying apace, and wearing quite out. Habits of prudence, formed by a careful education, might in some poor measure supply their place. But we have them not. In trifles indeed we are bred up to a strict observance of rules and forms and fashions; but in points of consequence every one is left, from his early youth, to do as he pleases; and they most, whose example will be most followed. General dislike and shame, however, might restrain persons, when they come out into the world, from several
vices,

* Jer. iv. 22.

vices, against which they had no preservative before. But with us, there are few vices or none of which any body needs be ashamed: the most notoriously guilty of the worst, are as well received in all places, if not better, than other persons. Yet, even in such a state, strict laws, vigorously executed, might deter, at least from the more immediately mischievous crimes. But we are destitute of this guard also. A great part of our laws, from the universal remissness of the times, are scarce executed at all; and, from the nature of our constitution, cannot be executed so effectually as where power is less bounded. Still this constitution, with its many defects, especially under a prince, who, God be thanked, most cordially wishes the continuance and improvement of that and every advantage to his subjects, amply compensates for many inconveniencies, and preserves many valuable privileges not enjoyed elsewhere. But then such inward disorders must by degrees impair and undermine it, till at length it will fall; possibly the sooner, the more safely we think we can follow our own devices. Peace may be no blessing to such as will abuse it; and the scripture hath told us long ago, that *the prosperity of fools shall destroy them*. After all, it would be something, if when we had reduced ourselves to the same condition with the rest of the world, in point of freedom at home, by our unworthiness and incapacity of it, we had a prospect remaining of security from abroad. Other nations, neither free nor virtuous, though internally miserable on both accounts, continue for a time, perhaps a considerable one, to answer purposes of God's wisdom, externally potent, courted and dreaded. But what consolation can we draw from hence, exhausted and burdened as we are; with so little to hope, as experience hath shewn us, even from the friendlier part of our neighbours; and so much to apprehend from the nearest and most powerful, who hath repeatedly attempted our destruction; whose strength, in the only weak article, will be recruited with zeal and indignation; to whose designs we have always been the chief obstacle, and whose success in them must be fatal both to our religious and civil interests?

Think not that *I am become your enemy, because I tell you the truth* *. Would God it would permit me to say every

thing that was pleasing to you. Think not that I delight, or even mean, to foretel evil; I mean only to caution you against it. And who shall or will, if the ministers of God's word do not? And what must follow? *I have seen, saith he himself, in the prophets of Jerusalem, an horrible thing: They strengthen the hands of evil doers, that none doth return from his wickedness. They say unto them that despise me, The Lord hath said, Ye shall have peace; unto every one that walketh in the imagination of his own heart, no evil shall come upon you. Behold a whirlwind of the Lord is gone forth in fury: it shall fall grievously on the head of the wicked. But if they had stood in my counsel, and caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way**. Think not, however, such language might be spared on this day of rejoicing. It might so indeed, had we either been hitherto innocent, or were now duly penitent: but being such, as God knows we are, admonition of our faults is indispensably necessary, to excite our thankfulness, that we are not punished in proportion to them; and warning of our dangers, to remind us of proving our gratitude, by that obedience which alone will obtain us protection. Would we but make this use of the present solemnity, then it would be a day of gladness indeed; a day *much to be observed unto the Lord through all our generations*†, for laying the only ground-work of public happiness. And therefore I must repeat to you, on the conclusion of this war, what I earnestly recommended to your consideration at the beginning of it, that when *Asha*, king of *Judah*, was returning home, both with peace and victory, the prophet *Azariah* went out to meet him, and said, *Hear ye me, Asha, and all Judah and Benjamin: The Lord is with you, while ye be with him: and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you*‡.

Other methods to support a tottering, or raise a sinking state, without reformation, frequently overturn it; and at best are only palliatives, temporary expedients, to delay a little its final ruin. *Thus saith the Lord of hosts, They have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace,*

* Jer. xxiii. 14, 17, 19, 22.

† Exod. xii. 42.

‡ 2 Chron. xi. 1, 2.

Peace, peace, when there is no peace *. *There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked* †. And not only the sacred writings have said this, but Heathens have said it, who knew them not; Infidels have said it, who regard them not; innumerable facts have proclaimed it in every age. But above all, it holds in limited governments like ours. There must be public virtue, or they cannot stand. There must be private virtue, or there cannot be public. There must be religion, or there can be neither. There must be true religion, or there will be false. There must be attendance on God's worship, or there will be no religion at all. Not four years ago, it was universally doubted whether we had principle enough, of any kind, left, to make an effort for the preservation of every thing valuable to us. Most happily more appeared than was expected. Yet God knows how it had proved, if the trial had gone but a little further. And for God's sake let us provide, as much as ever we can, against the next. How soon it may happen, is beyond human foresight. But in the meanwhile, we have some leisure, not only for personal amendment, which is equally possible in all seasons, but for concerting schemes, and executing, as well as framing, laws for public reformation. In war, many things, confessed to be right and necessary, are put off, because the attention must be confined to the immediate danger. And if they are put off in peace too, because there is no immediate danger, when are they to be minded; and what will be the consequence if they never are?

I would by no means excite a rash and ignorant zeal, to be meddling where we see not to the bottom of things; much less a factious one, to cramp and embarrass, disquiet and inflame. These practices must be hurtful; they may be pernicious; and the first article in true patriotism is conscientiously abstaining from them. Taking unwarrantable steps, in opposition to such as we may think, whether too hastily or not, bad men and bad measures, is only introducing additional wickedness of our own, and giving others a pretence for continuing, and even increasing theirs. Or should we succeed against them, yet such as act ill to get power to act well, seldom

* Jer. vi. 9, 14.

† H. lvii. 21.

dom or never use it to that purpose, when they have it, whatever they may intend beforehand.

The rule then is, that each perform his own duty steadily and calmly; rejoice, and acknowledge it with thankfulness, when others perform theirs; and be very moderate, when he apprehends they overlook or transgress it; endeavour to rectify what is wrong, so far as it belongs to his station; but *never exercise himself in matters which are too high for him**, nor watch more solicitously over the conduct of the state than over his own heart and life. He that neglects the latter, will seldom be thoroughly in earnest, and seldomer yet impartial, about the former; or though he were, will have much less weight than a better man. The one is incumbent on us all, the other on very few; in the one we need never mistake or fail, in the other we must frequently. Therefore let us earnestly *pray for the peace of Jerusalem*†; but remember, that the surest way of *seeking to do it further good*‡, is first to be at peace ourselves with God and with men.

Pressing you to general reformation, as the means of general happiness, may seem a very hopeless expedient; but it is the only one which Heaven hath pointed out, or will bless. Whether you will make use of it, depends on yourselves. We are *charged, before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom, to preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine*§. We do accordingly, *as ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, pray you in Christ's stead, Be ye reconciled to God*||: and when we have done so, *we have delivered our souls*¶; but we beg you think of your own. The fewer will amend, the more need there is that we should add to the number. Our doing it may be of some benefit to others, we know not how great; but at least will be infinitely beneficial to ourselves. We shall be happy whatever they be: happy, even at present; though less than if all were so. Probably, indeed, when times of trouble come, we shall suffer with them; but possibly not, or however not

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* Psal. cxxxi. 2.

† Psal. cxvii. 6.

‡ Ver. 9.

§ 2 Tim. iv. 1, 2.

|| 2 Cor. v. 20.

¶ Ezek. xxxiii. 9.



so much as we apprehend: *For the Lord knoweth how to deliver the Godly out of temptation* *. Or if he determine otherwise, he will *enable us to bear it* †: and *suffering now according to his will* ‡, is a title to more enjoyment in a better life. This world is not our main concern. They, who take it for their portion, will be every one anxiously providing for his own separate advantage in it; and consequently every one injurious to his neighbours, and uneasy in himself; but let felicity hereafter be the point in view, and tranquillity here will be the result. *The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep our hearts and minds through Jesus Christ* §. Even if we suffer, not only in common with others, but more than others; if we are despised, hated, ill treated, for what ought to procure us honour and friendship, our piety, integrity, regularity; still the spirit within us will support us; *we shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, with persecutions; and in the world to come, eternal life* ||. Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked, it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him ¶.

Doubtless good persons will be sorry, as they have cause, for what the public must undergo, unless reformation prevent it. But at the same time they will acquiesce, as they have cause, with entire complacency, in the justice of providence; and the more, as the severest dispensations of it are bringing forward continually, though by unseen ways, that blessed state of things, even on this earth, of which, however else improbable in itself, the attributes of God afford us hope; and his prophets, assurance. Nay, those nations themselves, whom, by his punishments, he makes miserable for being bad, may by that very misery be made good, and then happy. *I will leave in the midst of thee, saith God to Jerusalem, an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord. The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies. It*

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follows,

* 2 Pet. ii. 9.

† 1 Cor. x. 13.

‡ 1 Pet. iv. 19.

§ Phil. iv. 7.

|| Mark x. 30.

¶ Isa. iii. 10, 11.

follows, *They shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid* *.

Such a cure, though effected by such discipline, would be an unspeakable blessing. But surely we are not resolved, that no other shall do. God is trying at present milder methods; and the language of his proceedings is, *How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel?—Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together* †. But still in the midst of his mercies, his threatenings remain in full force; and we have a solemn warning, that *if, when we hear the words of his curse, we bless ourselves, and say, we shall have peace, though we walk in the imagination of our hearts;—the Lord will not spare us, but his anger and his jealousy shall smoke against us; and all the curses, that are written in his book, shall lie upon us* ‡. For a long time we seemed to think, that we might securely trust in our own wealth and strength, our own policy and bravery, let us behave to our Maker as we would. He hath given us, through a course of years, ample conviction of our mistake, if any thing will convince us; and he hath given us now time to act upon that conviction. Let us therefore at length entitle ourselves to trust in him: turn our minds *to fear God, honour the king, love the brotherhood* §, that is the public; cease from our profane discourse, our unbelieving presumption, our uncharitable contentions, our selfish projects, our dissolute pleasures, our idle amusements, our fashionable affectations, our destructive expences: beg pardon of our guilt, through Jesus Christ; and assistance of our weakness, through the spirit of grace: govern our lives by the rules of the gospel; and both awe and cheer ourselves by continual thoughts of that *day, when God will judge the world in righteousness, by that man, whom he hath ordained* ||. All this is the indispensable duty of every one, were he to be single in performing it; there are some, God be thanked, who practise it now; th addition of a few, that would be exemplary, might win ^m more; and were but the imitation general, hear the promise

* Zeph. iii. 12, 13.

§ 1 Pet. ii. 17.

† Hof. xi. 8.

|| Acts xvii. 31.

‡ Deut. xxxix. 19, 20.

promise made to it. *Thus saith the Lord thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: I am the Lord thy God, which teacheth thee to profit; which leadeth thee by the way, that thou shouldst go. O that thou wouldst hearken to my commandments: then should thy peace be as the river; and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea*.*

* Isa. xlviii. 17, 18.

S E R M O N · CXXIV.

(Preached before the UNIVERSITY of OXFORD, on ACT SUNDAY in the Afternoon, July 8. 1733.)

THE ADVANTAGE OF A RIGHT EDUCATION.

DEUT. xxxii. 46, 47.

And he said unto them, Set your hearts unto all the words, which I testify among you this day; which ye shall command your children to observe to do all the words of this law.

For it is not a vain thing for you: Because it is your life; and through this thing ye shall prolong your days in the land whither ye go over Jordan to possess it.

THESE words contain the last exhortation, which *Moses*, the great founder of the *Jewish* state, gave his countrymen, on the very day wherein he had notice of his approaching death. He had freed them, with infinite danger to himself, from *Egyptian* tyranny, and the worse bondage of idolatry and superstition: he had received for them, from God's own mouth, such laws of life, as in their circumstances were most conducive to virtue and happiness: these he had delivered to his people, established on the surest foundation of regard; affectionate reverence to the object of all duty, and author of all good: he had laboured, with infinite patience, through a long course of years, to cultivate in them this important principle of religious obedience; and now, drawing near to the close of a life spent in their service, he recommends

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it again, first, with all the force of a most persuasive eloquence, and afterwards by every charm that poetry itself could add; setting happiness and misery before them, in an ode of divine sublimity and spirit, which they are commanded by Heaven to learn themselves, and teach their posterity. This, therefore, he communicates in a solemn manner to the whole congregation, as the conclusion of all his cares for them; and then takes his final leave in the exhortation of the text, confirming once more at his death the importance of those precepts which he had been giving them through his whole life. *Set your hearts, &c.*

Their own observance of God's law was securing the felicity of one generation only; but educating their children in religion and virtue, this was perpetuating blessings to each part of the society and to the whole; lasting prosperity and peace in the good land they were going to possess; and in that *better country* *, of which it was an emblem, *life for evermore* †.

The words afford then a just occasion for speaking,

I. Of the advantages of right education; and,

II. The duty of endeavouring that these advantages may be obtained.

I. The advantages, and indeed necessity, of right education.

Other creatures arrive, without their own care, at the small perfection of which they are capable, and there stop: but the whole of man's existence, that appears, is a state of discipline and progression. Youth is his preparation for maturer years; this whole life for another to come. Nature gives the abilities to improve; but the actual improvement we are to have the pleasure and the reward of giving ourselves and one another. Some minds, indeed, as some soils, may be fruitful without cultivation; others barren with it; but the general necessity is the same in both cases; and in both, the richest, and most capable of producing good fruit, will be over-run, if neglected, with the rankest and worst weeds.

Now, the only universal precaution that can be in this respect, Christianity hath furnished, by introducing a stated method

* Heb. xi. 16.

† Ps. cxxxiii. 4.

method of instruction unknown before ; which, joined with the parents private care, is, to the generality of mankind, sufficient for the purposes of intellectual and moral improvement. But to persons of more extensive influence, a more particular and appropriated institution is necessary, for the world's sake as well as their own. This, with regard to the teachers of religion, men almost without exception acknowledge ; but too commonly forget it in another case, of no less importance ; theirs, I mean, whose authority is to enforce the laws of conduct, and whose example is to lead the way in life. Here sometimes a wrong care, often an imperfect one, is taken by the fondest parents. The outward accomplishments and decencies of behaviour they teach them with great exactness, and do well ; but then, without the least further provision, send them abroad into the school of the world, there to learn what they can. The consequence is, what must naturally be expected : trifles and follies, ever readiest at hand, and best suited to the unjudging mind, get first into possession ; and, in many, leave place for nothing else to enter. Such, unqualified for the valuable employments of life, must lose their days in the low amusements of a false and effeminate politeness ; hoping for no higher a character, than a set of creatures, equally contemptible, can give one another by mutual admiration ; and happy, after all, if they chance to preserve an innocent worthlessness.

But suppose room left for some attention to knowledge, not even the forms of decent carriage, though obvious things, are fully learnt without regular application ; what sort of acquaintance then with science must that be, which is picked up occasionally and by accident ? A thorough one indeed we must judge it, were the first appearance to determine us ; that air of sufficiency, with which a person thus educated for the most part delivers his sentiments. But if we examine, as the world will, what is under this appearance to support it, then a mind is discovered, thoughtlessly persuaded of its own knowledge, where it is very ignorant, and affecting knowledge, even though it is conscious of having none : first making hastily whatever determination is fashionable, about questions half understood, and not at all considered, be their importance what it will ; and then going on immediately to act
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upon this determination, without the least diffidence, or the least thought what the laws of human actions are ; unmoved by reason, and scorning it ; but changing frequently on mere fancy ; and fluctuating through life without rule or guide, from the forward extravagances of a profligate youth, to the end of an early and despicable old age.

The benefits of conversation greatly depend on the previous attainments, both of those who are supposed to communicate knowledge and to receive it. If therefore instruction be neglected, conversation will grow trifling ; if perverted, dangerous. Still, acquaintance with the world, however corrupted, may be an useful part of education ; but then it must be the last. It gives a beautiful polish ; but of this the best prepared mind will be the most susceptible. It teaches many things ; but good or bad, according as the learner is qualified to distinguish. He whom, improved good sense hath enabled to observe upon common practice, will extract wisdom and virtue from the vices and follies of mankind : but such as are ignorant, and capable only of imitating, will of course admire the worst of what they see ; and be the more effectually ruined, the more they aim to be accomplished. It is therefore a merciless thing to throw out poor creatures, unprincipled in what is right, to shift for themselves, where so much wrong is to be learnt.

Regular cultivation of the understanding then is what good education begins with. The earliest branch of this, acquaintance with useful languages, unlocks the treasures of ancient learning, and makes the improvements of every age and climate our own. Then the politer parts of literature most agreeably open the faculties, and form the taste of young persons ; adorn our discourse, and endear our company, in ripper years ; give a grace to wisdom and virtue ; relieve the fatigue of our busy hours, and elegantly fill up the leisure of our vacant ones. At the same time the art of just reasoning opportunely comes in, to curb the licence of imagination, and direct its force ; to fix the foundations of science ; ascertain the degrees of probability, and unveil specious error. With this guide we proceed surely. Knowledge of nature opens the universe to our view ; enables us to judge worthily of the constitution of things ; secures us from the weakness of

vulgar superstitions ; and contributes, in many ways, to the health and security, the convenience and pleasure of human life. If from hence we go on to survey mankind ; a contemplation of their different states in different ages, and especially of their ancient regulations and laws, the public wisdom of brave and great nations, will furnish variety of useful reflections to the mind ; of teaching us to improve our own condition, often to be happy in it.

It must be obvious, how rational an entertainment these things are ; and how useful materials they furnish, to ripen and perfect that prudence and good sense, which not only carries us through the business of life, but gives relish and stability to the pleasures of it. If then knowledge ought to be attained, the way to it ought to be made easy ; by removing difficulties, cautioning against mistakes, and leading forwards in a right method. Above all, application ought to be secured by the authority of a prudent instructor, and emulation excited by a number of fellow-learners.

But if education stop here, it hath only given abilities and powers, the direction of which to right or wrong purposes is greatly uncertain still. He that knows not the proper use of his own being ; *what is man, and whereto serveth he ; what is his good, and what is his evil**, may easily employ his other knowledge so as to be much the worse for it. This inquiry then is the important one. Various methods of conducting life present themselves ; contradictory inclinations demand to be gratified : the conflict is painful ; the end of it may be more so : which way is right, and which shall we take ? Now, there is a science that can direct us here ; can shew us an inward principle, endued with native authority to govern all the rest ; obedience to which gives a steady aim and self-approbation to our conduct ; bestows on us the truest satisfactions of life, and delivers us from its worst evils. Nor are morals only the source of private happiness, but the great foundation of mutual security, the only one of esteem and friendship amongst men. A person of true goodness, though otherwise of small accomplishments, will always make an amiable figure in society, and be a valuable part of it ; where-

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* Eccles xviii. 8.

as, without a virtuous heart, the superior abilities of the great man will only render him a more extensive mischief; and the deceitful agreeableness of the gay man qualify him to mislead, betray, and ruin, more entirely, those with whom he converses. Thus, wherever wickedness increases, will misery increase also, till the end be universal confusion. For though a constitution, sinking under vice, may preserve, for some time, the florid look of health, yet inward strength, and lasting vigour, are what nothing but virtue, public and private, can give to any people. This is that true wisdom, *in whose right hand is length of days, and in her left riches and honour* *.

Now, the foundations of virtue are indeed laid by nature, both in the reason and affections of mankind, though fallen: but reason is so often inattentive, and affections are so easily depraved, that, without further care, those moral principles, which make the best part of our inward frame, will in most men be greatly obscured, and in some, to all appearance, quite effaced. And were even those of righter minds left each to form their private system, tenderness for their own failings, or prejudice for those of the world, would often lead them into imperfect notions and wrong practice. One indispensable branch then of liberal education is an accurate institution in this important science; to pull off the disguises which vice affects to wear, and place the consequences of it in a just light; to point out the less obvious advantages of virtue, and shew its restraints to end in real freedom; to represent the strict connections of its several parts, and make strong the proof, that *knowledge of wickedness is not wisdom, neither at any time the counsel of sinners prudence* †.

And when should the science of life be taught, but in the beginning of life, before evil habits are added to original depravity; whilst the natural regard to truth and right, the only inward restraint of incautious youth, remains comparatively uncorrupt, and the seeds of sin lie yet somewhat loose on the surface of the mind; much harder to be cleared away, when once they have taken root, and twisted themselves strongly about the heart. This, therefore, is the favourable

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opportunity,

* Prov. iii. 16.

† Eccles. xix. 22.

opportunity, in which authority and reason must exert at once their joint force. For discipline without instruction is mere tyranny; and instruction without discipline, little better than useless talk. Things owned to be fit and good are neglected, because disagreeable; things evidently hurtful pursued for present pleasure. Here authority comes in to the aid of reason; enforces virtuous application; restrains vicious indulgences; tempers the warmth of youth; prepares us for the future subordinations of life; conducts us safe through the unseen dangers of our most dangerous time; and then by gentle degrees withdraws its influence, as the power of self-government grows up. Where want of this care leaves young persons too soon in the worst of hands, their own, it is dreadful to see into what irretrievable miseries they plunge, in the very beginning of their course. And, therefore, the more liberty they are afterwards to enjoy, the more prudent, though not stricter, restraint they should be under at first, and entered by slow steps into the world at large, with all possible cautions given them of the hazards they are going upon, and (God knows) have little reason to be eager for.

But the most serious part of education is wanting still: the part which leads us, by the esteem of moral excellence, to honour and love that Being in whom the perfection of it dwells; and extends our inward sense of duty, suggested first by the low and short-lived relations between us and our fellow-creatures, to the highest possible and eternal object of it, the Creator and Ruler of this universe. He, by whose pleasure we are, from whose favour all that we enjoy and hope for comes, according to whose determination our whole existence shall be happy or miserable, is not surely one with whom we are unconcerned. And however a base nature may value itself on the impotent affectation of slighting God, every worthy mind will delight to express that veneration, and pay that obedience, which are due to him, who is the Lord of all: due by every strongest claim, whether unassisted reason discover the general laws of his moral kingdom, or infinite wisdom, the best judge of our circumstances, condescend to adapt to them further obligations. It is indeed the sense of our living under his government and care, that makes our condition of being desirable. Religion, filling the mind with that object
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which it naturally seeks, a sovereign protector, infinitely wise and good, effectually excludes all superstitious terrors; and, far from depressing the tenderest spirit, exalts us into every thought and every hope that is great and noble. Turbulence of passions, and obstinacy of self-will, these are the things that tear and weaken the soul: reverence of God, by awing them into composure, strengthens every inward principle that ought to be strong; and if it prunes the luxuriances, promotes, by so doing, the vigour of the mind. Religion comprehends at once every motive, both of virtue and of private interest, that can either direct or support the heart in every part of conduct; joins in perpetual union our duty and our happiness; and makes the universal scheme of things consistent, beautiful, and good.

Surely then principles of such a tendency ought to have an early and diligent cultivation in every breast, but theirs especially whose rank or profession will make it of the most public consequence. They who object against this care, as instilling prejudices, should consider, that virtue, honour, decency, are prejudices just of the same sort; and think what would follow, were men to enter upon life free from the bias of any one good quality. But in truth, God himself, not man, hath planted these just prepossessions in the heart; and all that education does, is to favour their growth. Religion, and the evidences for it, may indeed be unfairly represented by its teachers; and what part of knowledge may not? But are only the teachers of religion capable of misrepresenting it? Hath not every vicious man as strong a motive to incline him against it, as even those maintained by it have to incline them in its favour? Hath not fondness of novelty, and affectation of superior sense and learning, as great influence on some persons as credulity can have on others? Do we not every day see men determine positively against religion, who are known never once to have thought of it in earnest; and attack it by all the unfair arts in the world, whilst they themselves are declaiming against such arts? Do we not see them even triumph in the thought of its being false, though the everlasting happiness of every good man depends upon its truth? And are these the worthy spirits, to whose tutoring young persons are to be delivered over in their native ignorance, for fear of

prejudices? Or is it not on all accounts wise and fit, that the mind, whilst untainted with evil communication or vice, should have the most important of all truths confirmed to it by proper arguments; and be formed to the right and happy temper of cheerful obedience to the greatest and best of Beings, *the Father and God of our lives**.

Since, therefore, instruction of youth in religion, virtue, and knowledge, appears attended with so many advantages, it follows,

II. That all persons concerned should endeavour, with united care, in their several stations, that these advantages may be effectually obtained, especially in the places dedicated to that purpose.

The public care, in this respect, we must ever gratefully own, continued through a long succession of our princes; and flourishing still in its height, under the administration of a king, zealous for the happiness of his people, and resolute to maintain all the rights of all his subjects. Next to whose assured and experienced protection, we cannot but graciously acknowledge the gracious munificence of his royal consort; therefore bountiful to religion and learning, because she most intimately knows their value, and most affectionately esteems them.

Secure then of the public favour to whatever is connected with the public good, we have only their attention to solicit who are personally interested: parents, or whoever supply their place; the conductors of education, and the young persons to be educated.

To you who are parents, nature itself hath given a tender concern for your childrens welfare as your own; and reminds you justly, that as you have brought them into the dangers of life, your business it is to provide that they get well through them. Now, the only provision commonly attended to, of wealth and honours, can never produce happiness, unless the mind, on which all depends, be taught to enjoy them properly. Fortune, without this, will but lead them to more abandoned follies of extravagance; and rank expose them to more public censure. Education then is the great care with which
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* Ecclus xxiii. 4.

you are entrusted ; scarce more for their sakes than your own. You may be negligent of your son's instruction ; but it is on you, as well as himself, that his ignorance and contemptibleness will bring both reproach and inconvenience. You may be regardless of his morals ; but you may be the person, who will at last the most severely feel his want of them. You may be indifferent about his religion ; but remember, dutifulness to you is one great precept of religion ; and all the rest promote such habits, as you may bitterly repent, when it is too late, your omission to cultivate in him ; and live and die miserable on his account, whom timely care would have made your joy and honour.

Parents therefore should always be friends to education, and to places of education : should wish well to them ; and never, without great reason, think ill of them. The enemies of religion and virtue, an increasing number, will of course be enemies to those who teach them ; and the more so, the more carefully they teach them. The enemies to either part of our happy constitution, will look with an evil eye on establishments, designed for the support of both. More private motives will excite injurious treatment of them from some persons. And even those of better meaning may be engaged, by misinformations and prejudices, to pass harsh judgments and say unfriendly things. But reasonable men will always distinguish, by what person, on what grounds, with what temper and what views, disadvantageous characters are given, or reports raised. They will also consider, that the unhappy divisions of this nation cannot but have caused, on all sides, in length of time, some degree of wrong opinion and wrong conduct towards one another ; mutual jealousies and misunderstandings between those, whose interests, and whose intentions, were in general the same : differences, which it must be ruinous to heighten, dangerous to continue, useless to pass judgment in ; but most important to reconcile, by such conduct on every hand, as may give no suspicion of ill design, but all proofs of good. Friendly methods will not fail to unite the hearts of men ; and make them susceptible of mutual advice and improvement, assistance and benefit. Whoever will view the seats of learning, with these considerations present to his mind, will judge favourably concerning them ;
and

and not only admire the pious bounty of our ancestors, who dedicated these delightful retreats to knowledge and virtue, founded these beautiful structures, enriched them with such amazing treasures of literature, and provided so nobly for the accommodation of fit persons to enjoy and communicate the instruction of them ; but be thankful for the many and great blessings, which they have conveyed to every age, and will, we hope, derive to latest posterity.

Ideas of perfection are visionary things ; but look into fact, and where will those, who inveigh against the education of our universities, recommend a more improving one ? The indulgent softness of the parents family is apt, at best, to give young persons a most unhappy effeminateness ; the governor, if he hath abilities, hath scarce ever authority to enforce diligence ; want of rivals keeps the mind languid ; and, upon the whole, seldom any thing considerable comes out. If now the contrary method be taken, of sending them, raw and uninstructed, to visit foreign countries ; what improvement will minds unprepared for improvement make there ? As to religion, the disuse of frequenting its exercises, and the daily view of its corruptions, will be in danger of effacing all regard to it. With respect to morals, in the midst of so great temptation, so little restraint, and so general bad example, it must be a high degree of virtue, that can keep itself in countenance. Then for such opportunities of instruction, as different laws, manners, and customs, may be supposed to give ; these require a mind trained up beforehand to attention and judgment. On all others they will be just as likely to make wrong impressions as right, if they make any ; but indeed what impressions of all kinds are usually made, and how far the improvements brought home answer the national expence for them, lies within the compass of daily observation.

If then, in the next place, we compare at least foreign universities with our own : is their theology worthier of God, more conformable to reason and primitive Christianity ; is their philosophy juster and more solid, less full of imagination and hypothesis, than that of our great countrymen, whose names I need not suggest ? Will the ornamental rewards of learning be more fitly bestowed, where no time previous to the application for them is required ? Will industry be more
universal,

universal, without any inspection over it; behaviour more regular, without any rule set to it; than where young persons are formed into orderly societies, distinguished by proper habits, restrained to proper hours, obliged to proper studies, and watched over with continual care? Miscarriages, after all, will happen in such numbers of such an age. But the general good order that reigns here, to most foreigners, not the worst judges in this case, appears incredible when related, and very surprising when seen. It remains only to wish, what there never was more hope of; that, as our universities have long excelled all others, they may continually improve upon themselves.

But still, parents must not expect their childrens improvement should be great, unless they contribute their own share to it. If indolence and luxury be taught them by bad example, or prejudice against every thing serious and praise-worthy by bad conversation, before they come hither; if they come with little or no charge given about regularity and application, but licence be claimed for them in proportion to their quality; or if, after the mere form of a short confinement here, they are let immediately loose, to wear off by negligence and profligateness the few slight good impressions that could be made; what room hath the parent to hope for improvement, or complain if none be found?

But let him be careful in his own duty first; then the persons, to whom he commits his child afterwards, will undertake, with some comfort, an office, laborious and important at all times; but particularly so in an age of uncommon corruption; when the expectations of good men are more than ever fixed on their discharging this trust well; and their failure will give bad ones the double joy of seeing wickedness flourish, and accusing them for it. Complaints indeed of unjust accusations were never better grounded; but complaints alone will do little good; and even deserved returns of bitterness may do much harm. The only remedy is, that *by well doing we put to silence* * the unreasonableness of ill persons, and secure the protection of those who mean well.

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* 1 Pet. ii. 15.

The educator of youth therefore will first perfect himself in each needful qualification, and then apply to forming others. In every science he will join the discoveries of later times with such instruction, as may render the learning of former ages intelligible; and prudently direct the more particular attention of each person to such things, as may chiefly relate to their future part in life.

The foundations of religion he will lay deep and strong; recommending the great articles of it, not to the passions of those under his care, by warmth and vehemence; but to their reason and faith, by just explications and conclusive arguments; neither loading revelation with unauthorized doctrines and needless difficulties; nor yielding up the least real part of it, to defend the rest; nor altering the least, to give it a more plausible appearance. A disputing and cavilling temper he will endeavour to repress; but will treat with all tenderness the doubts of an ingenuous mind; and ever encourage that sacred regard to truth, which makes men worthy of esteem, even whilst they err, and is the great security of their returning into the right way. He will take fit opportunity of shewing, how closely a due regard to the teachers of religion and virtue is connected with the practice of both. But the persons, whose employment teaching them is to be, he will studiously warn, that the only way of securing this regard is, by useful and exemplary lives; prudent and inoffensive conduct; and so hearty a friendship to all just and reasonable liberty, as may give them unsuspected authority to oppose the dissolute licentiousness, that in vain assumes its name.

To civil government he will conscientiously teach that dutiful obedience and honour, which Christianity requires all subjects to pay; and which the happiest subjects in the world ought to pay with the cheerfullest gratitude. He will discourage, with all possible care, the rage of party zeal; which warm and unexperienced minds too often mistake for public spirit. Admitted in this fair disguise, it possesses the whole man; tinctures his way of thinking on almost every subject; leads him to hate and injure worthy persons, to admire and associate amongst very bad ones; with whom this immoral temper stands in the stead of all merit, whilst indeed it hinders the acquiring of any. As life goes on, these evils increase;
of

of which all the world complains, but unhappily indulges them at the same time; instead of each curbing, on his own side, the eagerness and keenness of so malevolent a principle. Young persons should therefore be reminded, that the seats of learning are purposely sequestered from the busy scenes of life; that the time for engaging in those will come but too soon; and mean while the generous ardor of youth should be exerted in making the preparation of useful knowledge and virtuous habits; but ever tempered with such mildness and diffidence concerning matters; of which they need not judge yet, as they will every day see more necessary in order to judge and act right.

This is indeed one part of morals; and on every other part the director of education will have an attentive eye. Even the sallies of a well-meant fervor he will prudently moderate, when they give religion a gloomy appearance, or add to it a needless burden. But much more strictly will he guard against the opposite extreme of libertinism and profaneness; labouring to keep up, not only an outward form of regularity; but a serious awe of God, and sense of duty; in every mind; watching over each tendency to vice, and considering wilful neglect of application, as a dangerous kind of guilt. In order to this great end of preserving morals, he will preserve and countenance, as far as it remains possible, that temperance of living, simplicity of appearance, and frugality of expence, which are usually brought hither, and so peculiarly suit this institution; which keep the mind in fit temper for the exercise of its faculties; and defend it from the corruptions of luxury and vanity; lay the foundations of health and prudence in men for the rest of their days, and prepare them to be virtuous and easy in whatever stations may prove their share.

It remains only now, that the person, of whom all this care is taken, should know and improve his own happiness. Too many there are, that set out upon the important journey of life without a skilful, or perhaps a friendly hand, to conduct them through the difficulties of the untried and hazardous way. These are greatly excusable in their faults, and pitiable in their miseries. But of you God and man will expect attainments, that may bear proportion to the advantages, with

which you are blessed. Nature engages your parents ; duty, honour, and interest, your instructors, to consult your welfare ; which they desire as much as yourselves, and understand better. Restrain therefore and apply yourselves as they direct ; though you not only feel it painful, but see it not yet beneficial ; and trust those, who have all imaginable claim to be trusted, that, by quick degrees, the pain will wear off, and the benefit be evident.

Their province, who are devoted to the service of religion, will be to appear, perhaps after a very short preparation, in an age strongly prejudiced against them and their function ; sure objects, without merit, of contempt and hatred ; but, with it, capable still of being esteemed and useful. This situation, you see, requires in the first place, that you carefully acquaint yourselves with the proofs, the doctrines and precepts of the gospel revelation. Fear not therefore making free inquiry into every thing. Others inquire with bad intention ; if you do it not with good, you will want true learning, to oppose against the false and half-learning of unbelievers. Only begin not your inquiry till you are qualified ; and end it not till you have considered matters thoroughly. Young minds, and often the most generous of them, are apt to pursue truth with an impatience, that occasions their missing it. Nothing ought ever to stand against full evidence well weighed ; but many things may induce those, who have yet had little time for thought, to think again, and be diffident in the meanwhile. For not only the world too commonly imputes to a man, all his life, the indigested notions of his early years ; but persons list themselves by positive talk, and then cannot retreat. With this caution, and with due method, diligence will go far in acquiring knowledge. But knowledge is only one part of what must be attended to. The unguarded conduct, even of persons of younger days, will be treasured up in many a malicious memory to their future disadvantage ; and, though an affectation of untimely gravity fits ill, yet innocence and piety are the duties of every age. They especially, whose profession will make a stricter abstinence from doubtful and imprudent pleasures expected of them hereafter, will find it much the safest and easiest to begin now ; and, by an uniform

form life, grow regularly up into that esteem, which their destination will require.

And though neither the same diligence of application, nor such accuracy of conduct, may appear necessary in those of higher rank; yet an improved understanding must be an advantage, and the want of it a blemish, proportionably conspicuous, as the station, in which either appears, is public; and the choice, how life shall be spent, is always important in the same degree, as the persons are who make it. Such therefore, of all others, should not take it hastily for granted, that an immoral course is right. To begin with virtue, at least till fair inquiry rejects it, is evidently the safe part. No one ever bitterly condemned himself, that he had spent his younger years soberly; many have, that they did not. Then some degrees of vice are owned to produce misery; and every vice leads on to worse degrees of itself, and variety of others. Or, though a vicious person could depend on suffering no present harm; yet he cannot fail of doing a great deal; and a man would not choose, that the chief traces, which he leaves behind him, to mark out his passage through life, should be so many injuries done his fellow-creatures. At least no one would venture upon this, till he were sure there is no superior inspector of his conduct. Now there cannot be certainty against religion; and there are such evidences for it, as must require more than a few slight cavils, or bold jests, to overturn them. A careful examination then it justly demands. And if upon such examination it prove true, as undoubtedly it will; remember it is a most serious truth, in which the foremost of mankind is equally concerned with the meanest. Therefore in a case of such moment, let no false shame, nor favourite passion prevail over you; but *give your hearts early to the Lord that made you**. Lay the foundation of you lives here, on the firm ground of Christian faith; and build upon it whatever is just and good, worthy and noble, till the structure be complete in moral beauty. The world, into which you are entering, lies in wait with variety of temptations. Unfavourable sentiments of religion will soon be suggested to you; and all the snares of luxury, false honour, and interest,

spread in your way ; which with most of your rank are too successful, and to many fatal. Happy the few, that in any part of life become sensible of their errors ; and, with painful resolution, tread back the wrong steps which they have taken ! But happiest of men is he, who, by an even course of right conduct from the first, as far as human frailty permits, hath at once avoided the miseries of sin, the sorrows of repentance, and the difficulties of virtue ; who not only can think of his present state with composure, but reflect on his past behaviour with thankful approbation ; and look forwards, with unmixed joy, to that important future hour, when he shall appear before God, and humbly offer to him a whole life spent in his service !

SER.

S E R M O N CXXVII.

(Preached in the Parish Church of St. James, Westminster,
January 30. 1733-4.)

ON REVERENCE OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE IN GOVERNING ALL
THE AFFAIRS OF MEN.

ISA. xxvi. 9.

—*When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the
world will learn righteousness.*

THE gracious and wise Creator of this universe continually *upholds it by the word of his power**; and governs each part of it suitably to its nature. The motions of that inanimate world proceed entirely from him. The actions of intelligent beings are indeed their own. But, as God foresees from eternity what every agent, in every possible situation, will do or intend, he must be able to influence, direct, and temper their conduct, by many ways that are conceivable, and doubtless by many more, so as not only to assist and protect persons in *doing what is lawful and right*†, but also to make even the worst of wretches, in the worst of their crimes, undesigned instruments of his righteous purposes. And it being evidently as worthy of him, as it is easy for him, to act thus, the reason of mankind hath ever disposed them to believe, what revelation hath fully confirmed, that a *never-failing Providence ordereth all things, both in heaven and earth*‡. Whatever befalls us, therefore, prosperous or
adverse,

* Heb. i. 3.

† Ezek. xviii. 27.

‡ Collect for the Eighth Sunday after Trinity.

adverse, being what our Maker judges and determines to be, on one account or another, fit and proper, events of both sorts may justly be called *his judgments*. But as, through the wickedness of the world, he hath much oftener occasion to decree punishments than rewards, this name generally denotes the severer exercises of his power; the sufferings that he inflicts on men; or, in other words, that they bring upon themselves. For the strong connection, which we experience, of our follies and sins with distress and misery, is one thing that proceeds from the just judgment of God; from that order and course of things which he hath established.

Amidst the vast variety of providential dispensations, some are, to human faculties, unfathomable depths. We can only see in them the awful exertion of his authority, who is Lord of all; and learn the important lesson of humbling ourselves before him, and submitting meekly to his will; in firm expectation, that whatever may look disorderly and wrong at present, will prove in due time to be wisest and best. Other things there are capable of affording further instruction; concerning which, however, it is easy for partiality or inattention to make dangerous mistakes. For the same events being often permitted to befall very different persons, for as different ends, whoever will *judge according to the first appearance*, will be far from *judging righteous judgment* *.

But still, multitudes of occurrences remain. which convey such obvious and clear informations and warnings, that Providence must intend we should apply them to our own benefit. For God doth not punish merely for the sake of punishment. Even his severities are the effects of goodness; and always directed to the advantage, either of those who feel them, or at least of others; *that they may bear and fear, and do no more wickedness* †. Looking back on the transactions of past ages, without a moral intention in doing it, is only gratifying an useless curiosity, or acquiring knowledge full as likely to be ill used as well. But it is a most serious and profitable employment, humbly to trace the footsteps of infinite wisdom, in the government, as well as creation of the world; and think over the various scenes and wonderful vicissitudes

* John vii. 24

† Deut. xiii. 11.

ciffitudes of mortal affairs, in order to learn a true fenfe of our condition here, and right notions of behaving in it. *All things that have ever happened to men, have happened to them for enfamples : and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come* *. And furely an awful admonition it is, to have, as it were, the hiftory of our fpecies lying open before us ; and the whole experience of man, fince man hath been, teaching and testifying to us, what a dreadful train of evils, perfonal, domeftic, and national, every tranfgreffion of the laws of life is capable of drawing after it. Now, as fome of thefe facts gradually fink down in the abyfs of time, and difappear, the wickednefs of every generation is raifing up others in their room ; which, by the advantage of their nearnefs, we may obferve more diftinctly ; and receive deeper impreffions from them, becaufe of the clofer relation which they bear to us.

Amongft thefe, the dreadful deed of this day, and the calamities which preceded and followed it, fet before our eyes a moft peculiarly inftmctive example of divine judgments, brought down by a finful people on their own heads : concerning which, we may juftly fay, in the words of the prophet *Daniel*, that *under the whole heaven hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerufalem* †. To go through the detail of fo lafting and complicated a mifery, is no more poffible, than it would be proper, in a difcourfe of this kind ; the bufinefs of which is, neither to difpute upon the doubtful parts of the hiftory, nor to amufe the hearer with the particulars of what is moft undoubted, but to build religious and moral conclufions on thofe general facts, which every one muft admit, and will eafily recollect, on this mournful fubject. We all know the tragedy began with the too juft occafion, unhappily given on each fide, for complaints and fears. It proceeded, on the fide of the difaffected, to the unjuftifiable remedies, firft of fedition, then of open rebellion ; doubly unjuftifiable, as the grievances alleged were already redreffed : and it concluded, after the many diftreffes of a civil war undergone for feveral years, in the murder of the king, and the total ruin of the conftitution ; to which, after trying in vain every

* 1 Cor. x. 11.

† Dan. ix. 12.

every way to save it, and making such concessions for that end, as the better and greater part even of his adversaries voted to be sufficient, he died at last a willing and a patient martyr.

These are the principal points, from which we are now to draw proper uses. Passion and prejudice may easily suggest very improper ones; and this day become by such applications of things as contending parties are too apt to make, an instrument of perpetuating those animosities; against which it ought to caution us for ever. To censure with bitterness the persons or the proceedings on either side now, when all that were concerned on both, are gone long since to answer for their sins before God, is neither useful nor decent. And to ascribe at random the same dispositions to any of the present generation, is both uncharitable towards them, and prejudicial to the public. What lies before us on the occasion, is only, from the errors of our ancestors, to instruct and direct ourselves. And we shall never see clearly, either what those errors were, or how we are to guard against them, unless we consider things with a mild, as well as serious, temper of mind. This will teach us, even where we differ, as men must be allowed to differ, in judging what the conduct of others was formerly, and how far it was right or wrong; to agree however in our determination of the essential question; what our own conduct ought to be now. Thus we shall be sure to avoid all hurtful conclusions, and take the right way to make a variety of useful ones. For doubtless every rank of men amongst us, both in church and state, from the highest to the lowest, may *learn* most important lessons of *righteousness*; from those failures of their predecessors, and those ensuing miseries, which we lament this day. There was no one party, or order of men, but did wrong; nor almost any one thing, in which they sinned, but they suffered a like return for it. And it should be our business at present, whatever our station is, ecclesiastical or civil, not only to recollect the faults in others, of which those, who went before us, complained; but chiefly those, into which they fell themselves. For thus each part of the society, instead of such mutual imputations, as tend to make the whole uneasy, would be led to such a home amendment, as tends to make it happy. But leaving

and recommending to every sort of persons, the care of drawing inferences, rightly suited to their own cases in particular; I shall only enlarge on the general directions, which so dreadful a time of sin, and suffering, may give to us all in common.

Now the great comprehensive lesson, which God intends to teach by every judgment, is an awful regard to himself, as the moral governor of the world; and a faithful practice of true religion. But here some will instantly object, were not the mischiefs of those days chiefly owing to religion; many of the disputes merely of a religious nature; and all of them embittered beyond measure by a mixture of religious animosities? How then is it recommended to us from hence? A little patient attention will show you. Real religion, the love of God our common father, the love of him whose peculiar precept is *to love one another* *, can never produce hatred and contention upon earth. It is the strongest bond, that can be, of union and peace: the strictest restraint of every injurious passion; the most powerful incitement to every benevolent and merciful deed. It is the only foundation of trust and security, amidst all that can happen around us; and of tranquillity and joy within us. But hypocrisy, superstition, and enthusiasm, though extremely different from religion, are often mistaken for it; and these may work very fatal effects under its name, especially when pretences of extraordinary piety and purity, on one side, are made peculiarly plausible and popular, by the prevalence of immorality and profaneness on the other; which enormities, though far from universal, were too common, amongst the friends of the royal cause, notwithstanding the excellent example of the king, whom even his enemies owned to be sincerely pious, and strictly virtuous. But then, if religion may be counterfeited or perverted to bad purposes, so may every good thing in the world; honour, friendship, loyalty, public spirit, liberty itself. And things of an indifferent nature, and little use, if often misapplied, it is just and prudent to abolish. But attempts against the principles, that keep society from dissolution, as far as they

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* John xiii. 34. xv. 12, 17.

can be effectual, must be pernicious. And amongst these principles, God hath taken especial care, that the first and great law of our being, the reverence due to himself, shall be extirpated out of the world; and that every effort to weaken it, shall be close followed by consequences of private and public misery; which will severely prove, as indeed they have begun to do amongst us, that whatever men, *wise in their own conceit**, may think, *the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, is understanding*†.

The thing then to be endeavoured is, not to lessen but increase the regard to true religion; only distinguishing it carefully from whatever else puts on its name. Want of this care produced great errors and evils, in the days of which I am speaking. There was, it must be owned, in the friends and governors of the church, an over warm zeal, and very blameable stiffness and severity. But there was also, in the enemies of the church, a most provoking bitterness and perverseness; with a wild eagerness for innovation, founded on ignorant prejudices, which their heated fancies raised into necessary truths; and then, looking on them as the cause of Christ, they thought themselves bound and commissioned to overturn whatever was contrary to them. The enthusiasm of that belief gave them a spirit and vehemence in all they undertook; which common men, acting on common motives, could hardly be expected to withstand. Their success, in its turn, inflamed their imaginations of being directed and assisted from above; and they thought themselves authorised by this higher dispensation, to tread under foot, without scruple, the ordinary rules of right and justice.

Let us always then beware of all such mistakes, as then prevailed on either side. Let us never be vehement for or against matters of indifference; about matters of importance, let us be earnest with mildness; and neither desire to see authority exercised in religion, to the oppression of any ones conscience. Let us coolly consider, of which extreme we are most in danger, and oppose that; whatever shape or name it assumes. The name is but a circumstance; the thing to be dreaded is, the principle, or the practice, of advancing favourite

* Rom. xi. 25. xii. 16.

† Job xxviii. 28.

vourite notions and schemes by force or fraud. The Puritan zealots were shockingly guilty of that crime. The church of *Rome* is, if possible, still more so: probably not a little concerned in bringing on us the evils of this day; certainly a determined enemy, ever to be had in view, feared and guarded against. But then the effectual method of guarding against falsehood, is not by opposing to it a contrary falsehood, as bad or worse, and setting up licentiousness to encounter bigotry: this, instead of curing, is multiplying evils; which, opposite as they seem, will thrive together, and each assist the others growth. Nothing can secure us from false religion but true: nothing give happiness, private or public, but that serious regard to God, which will place us under his fatherly protection; and such rational notions of the doctrines and precepts of his holy word, as will direct us into the practice of all those duties which we owe to each other.

The second lesson of righteousness, which the judgments of Heaven on our forefathers plainly teach us, is paying due obedience to legal authority, and religiously abstaining from the smallest instances of disrespect to it; since we find they have insensibly carried, even well-meaning and wise men, into the utmost lengths of wrong and imprudent behaviour. All the disorders, of which this day reminds us, began with the lower marks of disaffection: immoderate complaints, indecent reflections, ill-natured interpretations, groundless suspicions, first thoughtlessly, then designedly, spread abroad, till by degrees they took such root, that nothing was too bad to be believed; nothing good enough to be approved. Discontent and clamour soon ripened into sedition and tumult; after which, open rebellion and general confusion followed of course. Still, it is by no means unlawful, either to represent grievances, or to oppose ill measures. On the contrary, doing these things preserves a government; neglecting them leads to its ruin: and had the means of doing them been freely and early allowed, and honestly used, in the times we are now considering, probably none of the mischiefs that followed had ever been known. But then, representations must always be true, decent, needful, seasonable. And opposition should never be made, but after impartial consideration, with evident necessity, by peaceful and regular methods, by pru-

dent and cautious steps ; with proper submission to all that are set over us, and with the most sacred regard to the sovereign power ; for if that be shaken, experience hath shewn us all is in danger. Let us therefore only remember, that whatever was wicked and pernicious formerly, is of the same nature still ; and it will prove an excellent direction to our conduct. From hence persons in lower stations will learn, not to disquiet themselves and their neighbours, to ill purpose, with injudicious vehemence concerning things out of their sphere, but leave those to conduct them whose business it is ; thinking charitably of them, and praying heartily for them. Those of higher degree will be induced to proceed, in what lies before them, with temper and considerateness, with equity and candour ; with care, neither to provoke resentment, nor excite jealousy. And we shall all of every rank be instructed, to acknowledge thankfully the many blessings that we enjoy, beyond what our miserable ancestors did a century ago ; and not only to bear with cheerfulness the necessary, though heavy burdens, that have been laid on us, for the safety of all which can justly be dear to us, but submit with patience to whatever, we may any of us apprehend, we suffer more than we need ; seriously reflecting, what fatal effects may arise from a different spirit. For in the times before us, when there were confessedly many grievances, and some of them great ones, yet how inconsiderable were they, when compared with the bloodshed and devastation, the oppression and confusion, the total destruction of church and state, which unwise and undutiful attempts for redress at length produced ! Let not us, therefore, *murmur, as some of them murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer* *.

A third lesson, which this day affords us, is, not to be fond of innovations, either in civil matters or ecclesiastical. It is a common weakness of mankind, to overlook the advantages of their condition, and dwell only on its inconveniencies and defects, real or imagined ; till, though a very tolerable, or perhaps, on the whole, a very good one, it appears to them worse than any other into which they can fall. Even the more indolent, therefore, instead of discountenancing, look
favourably

* 1 Cor. x. 10.

favourably on proposals for change. And the more enterprising rush on with eagerness to unhinge and overset; never once reflecting, whether the project be not either impossible to be accomplished, or not worth the pains; injurious to others, or likely to prove pernicious to themselves; never seriously considering what they have to substitute, whether it can take place; and last, whether it will be, on the whole, for the better or the worse. Thus were too many of our predecessors in this nation disposed: extremely miserable under a constitution of government, which they found too late inseparable from their happiness; and so earnest to reform every part of it, that they ruined the whole. The projects for establishing perfect liberty in the state, ended, as too much liberty always will, in absolute tyranny: successive tyrannies, of various shapes, and names unheard of, dispossessing each other; harassing the nation with continual uncertainties and alarms; exhausting it with daily executions and impositions. The schemes for restoring an imaginary purity in the church, unexpectedly ran to such lengths, as destroyed the whole frame of it, and involved the crown in its fall. No other form of religion could be set up instead of that which was abolished. Mens minds were held in continual agitation, by the wild zeal of contending sects: teaching doctrines, some blasphemous against God; some subversive of all order amongst men; some contrary to all care of virtue and good life; and every thing was tolerated, but what had a right to be established. How these things would have ended; whether in a total contempt of religion, and moral obligations too; or whether, after that was found insupportable, as it soon must, the *Romish* superstition, ever vigilant and active, would have overspread the nation, wearied out with divisions, and glad to embrace any thing that promised unity: this God hath mercifully hid from our knowledge, by blessing us, in the extremity of such misery, with its only cure, the restoration of our ancient constitution. Let us esteem it then as we ought, and be zealous to preserve it; improve it, if we can really and safely; but not be forward to practise upon it without necessity, or some very valuable end. Hoping for perfection in any thing human, is visionary; murmuring for want of it, is resolving never to be happy; and taking irregular methods

to obtain it, is the sure way to be wretched. Some alterations, indeed, from time to time, the reason of things, and the changes of circumstances may require: but that no wanton or doubtful, much less dangerous trials, ought to be made, the fatal experience of this day fully shews.

And a fourth direction, which it gives as plainly, is, to beware of the spirit of party. Nothing but that could have blinded and embittered people so, as to make them destroy themselves and the public, without seeing or feeling it. Few, if any, at first, had the least intention of what they afterwards did: very probably, had it been foretold them, they would have abhorred the thought. But persons cannot even guess, when they give themselves up to this kind of zeal, how strong it may grow within them; or how they may be entangled, and carried on, against their wills. *The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water*: nobody can say how far it may overflow, or how hard it may be to get it back into its channel, and repair the breach. *Therefore leave off contention, before it be meddled with**, and by mutual provocation worked up into a rage. When party resentments and contests run high, the general good is no longer in view: both sides attend wholly to the advancement of their own power; depressing their adversaries; forcing them into measures hurtful to the public; the worse the better; and no way is left untried to ruin one another, till the ruin of the whole is too probable a consequence. But above all, in countries blest with freedom, amidst numberless advantages, there is one peculiar danger; that the high spirit which it gives men, and the full opportunities which they have to exert that spirit, may produce dissensions utterly destructive, not only of peace and comfort, but, in the end, of freedom itself. Let us therefore always remember *St. Paul's* caution. *If ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another*†: and behave suitably to *St. Peter's* rule, *as free, yet not using our liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God*‡.

These then are the instructions, which the dreadful judgment, this day commemorated, affords us: to *fear God, honour*

* Prov. xvii. 14.

† Gal. v. 15.

‡ 1 Pet. ii. 16.

your the king, and not meddle with them that are given to change *; but lead quiet and peaceable lives, in all godliness and honesty †. The transgression of these duties, was, by the natural consequences of things, and the just permission of heaven, the cause, on the peoples part, of those terrible calamities, under which our ancestors groaned so long; and were made to *learn righteousness*, not as we, by experience of others, but by heavy sufferings of their own. To these, however, God in his good time graciously put an end: and re-establishing our ancient form of government, hath, by a wonderful succession of kind providences, preserved it, through innumerable dangers, from abroad and at home, to this day. Nor perhaps, with all the faults of the present age, which God knows are neither few nor small ones, would it be easy for us to fix on almost any other time or country, in which we could, with reason, rather have made it our choice to live. Let us therefore join gratitude for his mercies with fear of his judgments; and be moved by both, to piety and virtue, public and private. He hath given us great and frequent proofs of his readiness to save and protect us; together with some few most deserved instances of displeasure and punishment; thus placing before our eyes, and leaving to our choice, the happiness of a religious, loyal and moral people, or the miseries of a profane, rebellious, and wicked one. *Now, therefore, to conclude in the words of the prophet Samuel, If ye will fear the Lord, and serve him, and obey his voice; then shall both ye, and the king that reigneth over you, continue following the Lord your God. But if ye will not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against his commandment: then shall the hand of the Lord be against you, as it was against your fathers ‡.*

* Prov. xxiv. 21.

† 1 Tim. ii. 2.

‡ 1 Sam. xii. 13, 14, 15.

S E R M O N CXXVIII.

(Preached in the Parish Church of St. James, Westminster,
November 27. 1737, being the Sunday after the Death of
her Majesty the late Queen Caroline.)

THE ADVANTAGES OF VISITING THE MANSIONS OF DISTRESS.

ECCLES. vii. 4.

The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning.

THE providence of God is one great instrument, which he uses for our instruction; and every dispensation of it is fitted to convey very useful admonitions to persons of attentive minds. But the mournful events of things have a peculiar force to excite recollection and serious thought; to place our condition here, in a just and strong light before our eyes; to awaken sentiments within us, of piety and resignation, humanity and compassion; and prompt us to make these the rule of our conduct. So long as nothing alarms us, we grow too commonly negligent and inconsiderate; forget our dangers, forget our mercies; give up our hearts to every passion that seizes on them; and thus are often led to do great harm, both to others and ourselves. But *when the judgments of God are in the earth, then the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness* *. When the voice of the Lord crieth unto the city, *Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it* †: then the ears

* Isa. xxvi. 9.

† Mic. vi. 9.

ears of them that hear shall hearken; the heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge*. But of all the strokes of God's hand, that which carries the greatest awe with it, is death; the sentence of the Lord over all flesh†. The sight or the thought of that important change, from the constitution of our nature, makes very strong impressions upon us; and the longer we revolve the subject in our minds, the more reason we find to be deeply affected by it; and act with a continual view to it. Nothing therefore would influence us more effectually to *apply our hearts unto wisdom*‡; if it were not for this one circumstance, that being surrounded with daily instances of mortality, they are familiarized to us in such a manner by their frequency, that though in reason they ought to have the greater effect upon us for their number, yet in fact they have usually little or none, unless there be something either in their nearness to us, or their public importance, to distinguish them from common cases, and engage a more interesting attention to them. We should therefore be very careful never to miss the opportunity of improving ourselves by due reflexions on such deaths, as our own particular concern in them, or the general one, makes considerable; but, how great soever our loss be otherwise, resolve to gain this advantage notwithstanding; that *by the sadness of the countenance our heart shall become better*§.

For so valuable a purpose, it is well worth while to bear with all the gloominess of *the house of mourning*; to place ourselves voluntarily in it a while, and return thither from time to time; deliver ourselves up to such meditations, as we find it fitted to inspire; and dwell upon them somewhat longer, than the first unavoidable impressions oblige us. For most useful lessons will *the heart of the wise* be able to learn there; and excellent rules of conduct, with respect to himself, to the memory of those who are deceased, and to such as they have left behind them.

I. With respect to himself. *Death is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to his heart*||. It is because we do not lay it to our hearts, that we most of us go on just as if

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* Isa. xxxii. 3, 4.

† Eccles xli. 3.

‡ Ps. xc. 12.

§ Eccles vii. 3.

|| Eccles. vii. 2.

we imagined there was to be no end at all; and though we do not indeed speculatively think so, yet we live and act upon that supposition; and our knowing it to be a false one hath no manner of influence, for want of reflecting upon it as such. Hence we indulge our souls in vehement desires, and fill our days with endless projects; every point gained, opening an inlet for more to be aimed at; every failure, redoubling our earnestness to recover our lost ground; and we never recollect, how life is wasting under us all the while. Even to the departure of others before our eyes we attend, only as an opportunity of framing and following new schemes; and thus the death of our fellow-creatures proves an occasion of our forgetting the more entirely, that we shall ever die ourselves. This could not be, would we but stop a little at *the house of mourning*; and make the most obvious of all reflexions there, from contemplating the end of others, how very quickly our own end may come, and how soon it must. Such thoughts will enliven our diligence in performing our duty here; in *working, while it is day, the works of him that sent us* *. For how suddenly soever the night may overtake us thus employed; *blessed is that servant whom his Lord, when he comes, shall find so doing* †. But the same sort of meditations must surely moderate, beyond all things, our warmth in every other pursuit; and dispose us, instead of plunging inconsiderately forwards, till in the midst of our bustle we drop unexpectedly into the grave; rather to secure the present time, for recollecting, before we go out of the world, what our behaviour hath been hitherto in it: that so we may endeavour to correct our mistakes, supply our omissions, perfect our faith and repentance; and through God's grace, which alone can enable us, form ourselves into such a temper of mind, *that we may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless* ‡.

And as the thoughts of death are excellently fitted to compose the vehemence of our other passions, so they are fitted particularly to check that very sinful kind of vehemence, which we are exceedingly prone to express, one against another. Whoever will but consider of how short a duration our existence here is, and with how great a number of unavoidable sufferings

* John ix. 4.

† Matth. xxiv. 46.

‡ 2 Pet. iii. 14.

sufferings it is filled, will be thoroughly convinced, that there is no manner of need for us to load the *few and evil days** of our fellow-creatures with additional uneasinesses, but great occasion to give one another all the comfort we can; and live as friendly as possible, whilst we stay together, with those from whom we are to part so soon, and appear before the father of all, who will treat us, as we have treated our brethren.

Another instruction, which *the heart of the wise* will learn *in the house of mourning*, is, never to flatter himself with expectations of any lasting good in a state so uncertain as this. For let the prospect appear as fair as it will; yet besides a multitude of other things to destroy it, every single instance of death reminds us, that our own lives may fail; that their lives, in whom our happiness is placed, or on whom our hopes depend, may fail; and even those, who seem to stand at a great distance from us, may overturn, by their fall, the whole edifice, which our forward imagination had erected. Undoubtedly the dreams, which men indulge, of enjoying more in the world than it hath to bestow on them, are mighty pleasing ones for a while. But from the first they do us harm; they give us a different turn of mind, from what our Maker intended we should have; and when a disappointment comes; then lasting wretchedness immediately succeeds our short-lived felicity. For, whether we continue in a state of dejection; or whether we repeat the same folly; expect again, and are again deceived; either way we are miserable. Or could we escape with ever so little uneasiness, or enjoy in this manner ever so much pleasure here; yet setting our hearts on that, as our portion, and seeking our happiness where God hath not placed it, can never end well for us. And therefore we should contemplate with care every dispensation of providence, that may warn us against so fatal a mistake; and hearken diligently to that voice, with which God hath appointed that every thing on earth shall cry aloud to us: *Arise ye, and depart: for this is not your rest*†. So far from it indeed, so absolutely incapable is the present world of giving us any security for any one enjoyment, that the highest and the lowest

* Gen. xlvii. 9.

† Mic. ii. 10.

persons in it are quite upon a level in this respect; equally unable to promise the least thing with certainty, either to themselves or to others. Whatever is human, is alike precarious; and our only sure dependence is on the power that made us. *Put not your trust in princes, nor in any child of man: for there is no help in them. Their breath goeth forth; they return to their earth: in that very day their thoughts perish. Blessed is he, that hath the God of Jacob for his help; whose hope is in the Lord his God; which made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is therein; which keepeth truth for ever**. A world, like this, cannot be the seat of happiness; yet our gracious Creator and Father certainly designed us to be happy. And therefore, the less provision he hath made for it here, the surer we may be, that a better state remains in reserve. It is true, indeed, we are all sinners; and from our own deserts, could have little ground of comfort in looking beyond the grave. But we have it abundantly from the assurance of forgiveness, on most equitable terms, in Jesus Christ; *who hath brought life and immortality to light*†, and *delivered them, who, through fear of death, were all their life time subject to bondage*‡. Here then it is, that the uncertainty of life, and every thing in it, directs us to fix; on the firm foundation of faith in the gospel of our blessed Redeemer. Secured, by him, of future bliss, in proportion to the present afflictions, which we bear as we ought, we shall pass through them all, not only with composed, but cheerful resignation: the more steadfastly we look on the dark side of objects, the clearer light will arise to us out of them; and the truest consolation from *the house of mourning*.

You see, therefore, what improvement *the heart of the wise* may receive from a general consideration of *the end of all men*. But the further view, of the different ends of different men, is a subject of yet further advantage. *The wicked is driven away in his wickedness; but the righteous hath hope in his death*§. The former of these reflections is indeed a very dreadful, but a very instructive one. For whether we set before our eyes the dying terrors of an ill person, whose con-

science

* Ps. clxvi. 3—6.

† Heb. ii. 15.

‡ 2 Tim. i. 10.

§ Prov. xiv. 32.

science is awakened too late, or the fatal insensibility of one *hardened through the deceitfulness of sin**, and going to *lie down in sorrow*†, without the least apprehension of it, no admonition can be either stronger or more important, than that which both these cases naturally convey. But the death of the righteous gives instruction unattended with horror; and the seriousness which it inspires, is pleasing and peaceful. In one way, indeed, of considering things, the departure of good and virtuous persons from amongst men, is matter of most melancholy reflection. Their number is very small, and their use is very great. *They are the salt of the earth*‡, that preserve society from utter corruption and dissolution. And though the generality of the world hath little regard to this, and is much more apt to depreciate the merit of such, than to think of the good they do, or the evils they prevent, yet the example and influence of but a few of them, distributed amongst the rest of mankind, is a thing of much benefit: and when any of them are qualified with eminent abilities, and placed by Providence in stations of importance, there are times when their life may be a blessing of incredible extent, and their death prove the means of opening a breach for unknown mischiefs to rush in. *Help, Lord; for the godly man ceaseth: for the faithful fail from among the children of men*§. *The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and the merciful are taken away; none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come*||. Such reflections as these, it may perhaps appear wisdom rather to drive from us, than invite them to disquiet us. But it is always wise to think of whatever it is possible to prevent: and a reformation of national sins is the plain method to prevent the coming of national calamities, as the reformation of ourselves is to prevent our being, upon the whole, the worse for them, if they should come. Whatever human supports may at any time fail, God will always support that people who place a virtuous trust in him. Or though a nation were growing, in appearance, incorrigibly bad, yet they who are careful to preserve themselves from the spreading infection, particularly by prudent

* Heb. iii. 13.

† Isa. l. 11.

‡ Matth. v. 13.

§ Ps. xii. 1.

|| Isa. lvii. 1.

prudent meditations on the threatening removal of valuable persons, may possibly be thus excited to such usefulness, as will defer, if not hinder, its ruin; at least they take the way to *deliver their own souls**, undoubtedly from the punishments of another life, and perhaps also, wholly or in part, from sufferings in this. *The days of man are like a shadow, that declineth; and he withereth like the grass. But the Lord is the same; and his years shall have no end. The children of his servants shall continue; and their seed shall stand fast in his sight†.*

Be the loss, therefore, otherwise as great as it will, which befalls, at any time, either the public in general, or ourselves in particular, when the hand of God snatches away the worthy and the eminent, yet thinking seriously and rightly upon it, we may certainly extract more than a little good from it. And whoever is taught effectually, by such an occurrence, to *cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils‡*, and place his expectations and hopes in the ever-living God, far from being overwhelmed by the melancholy part of the event, will be able, with a very considerable degree of composedness, to contemplate and improve by the enlivening and comforting parts.

Amongst others, it surely is one very great comfort, to see or to hear of that distinguishing tranquillity, with which religious persons meet their approaching dissolution. *Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace§.* Sometimes, indeed, fears and doubts, arising from the influence of a disordered body, cloud the mind of the righteous at their death, and obscure their setting sun. Nor is it useless to take notice even of these cases, for our future satisfaction, if ever the like should be our own, that our covenant-right to God's favour may be very well grounded, notwithstanding, for the present, we are quite incapable of seeing and *rejoicing in the light of his countenance||*. But when the pious soul enjoys, in that hour, its genuine serenity, then is the beauty of holiness beheld in the strongest point of view. Then we have a noble opportunity of discerning what religion

* Ezek. xiv. 14.

† Ps. cii. 11, 27, 28.

‡ II. ii. 22.

§ Ps. xxxvii. 37.

|| Ps. lxxxiii. 16.

gion is, and what it can do, when we observe the manner in which it enables those, who are supported by it, to possess themselves in the face of death. When we see them, in the strength of it, joining the tenderest affections to those whom they leave behind, with the quietest submission to part with them; and the most virtuous reasons for wishing to stay longer here, with the most dutiful obedience to him who calls them away: when we see them calmly divesting themselves of their dearest attachments to life; and only solicitous to provide, by serious advice and kind recommendations, for the happiness of those who survive them: in the midst of the acutest pains, *waiting*, with the mildest patience, *all the days of their appointed time* *; and preserving a greater sensibility of every ones sufferings than their own: shewing themselves now, what they always were; but rising in their virtues proportionably to their trial; and testifying that *their faith is the victory that overcometh the world* †: such occasions, as God knows they had need bring some advantage with them, furnish us with uncommon means of learning, in the chambers of death, what are the true principles for the conduct of life. But,

II. The *heart of the wise*, whilst it dwells in the house of mourning, will not only improve itself in a general sense of Christian piety, but also more especially, in such precepts of it as constitute a proper behaviour with respect to the memory of those whose departure is at any time the object of our thoughts. The dead, indeed, are out of our reach: our goodness extends not to them, and our enmity can do them no harm. But for the sake of common justice and humanity, we are bound to the amiable duties, of shewing candour in regard to their failings, and paying the honour which is due to their merit.

That we should speak and think with mildness, concerning such as partake of our own nature, and are in nothing more like us, than in the frailties to which they may be liable, this is what all men, at all times, have a right to claim from us. But they who *have finished their course* ‡, and *whose dwelling is no longer with flesh* §, they seem to have a peculiar exemption

* Job xiv. 4.

† 1 John v. 4.

‡ Acts xx. 24. 2 Tim. iv. 7.

§ Dan. ii. 12.

emption from those severities of censure, which amongst the living are so much too liberally distributed and returned. Not that good and bad characters are to be confounded after death, any more than before it; or *the wicked to be as the righteous* * in that respect, or any other. But yet, not even the crimes of such as have been worse offenders than ordinary, should be related with aggravation and insult; or indeed be mentioned at all, more than the interests of virtue and mankind require. Much less are we at liberty to trample on the ashes of persons, on the whole religious and virtuous, or receive accusations against them, of which very possibly a great part may chiefly, or entirely, proceed from invention or mistake, from ignorance of facts, or inattention to circumstances, or weakness of judgment. Nay, indeed, we ought not to dwell upon the failings with which we have the best reason to apprehend they were chargeable; so as to give these for their character, but cast a veil over their imperfections, in reverence to their estimable qualities. Towards the living this is our duty; but if we fail of it towards the dead, nothing can excuse us. The thought of that awful change, which they have undergone, might alone be sufficient to calm every emotion and prejudice that we may formerly have felt against them. But besides, all the provocations that we can have received from them, are now at an end. In whatever they have interfered with us, they will do so no more. Whatever we have thought blameable in them, the cognizance, whether it be or not, is removed to a higher tribunal. They are gone to answer for their deeds: we shall very shortly follow to answer for ours: let us judge one another with that mercy with which may our Lord and Master judge us all. And let us remember too, that in a worldly way of considering things, this is the discreet method. *Rejoice not over thy greatest enemy, when dead; but remember that we die all* †. Soon will the time come, when our names also shall lie exposed to such usage as the survivors may think fit to give them. And therefore the consideration of what is *the end of all men*, should make us much too prudent, ever to set an example of posthumous rancour; and incline us, by treating the

* Gen. xviii. 25.

† Eccles viii. 7.

memories of others with generous tendernefs, to fecure the fame treatment to our own hereafter.

The next duty of which mortality fhould remind us, towards the deceased, is paying juft honour to their virtues. Honour is a debt, owing indeed to worthy characters in this world ; but feldom well paid, till after they are gone out of it. As foon as it is too late, we begin to perceive, that they deferved to have been much more highly valued than they were. And we fhould all of us learn from hence, to efteem thofe for the future, whilft they are alive, whom we fhall efteem when they are dead. But at leaft, when they have completed the part affigned them here, and performed the principal fcenes of it well, then it becomes high time that thofe applaufes fhould be given them, which were their due before ; and their memory be put in poffeffion of whatever they ought to have perfonally enjoyed. Flattering the dead will do neither them, nor indeed their reputation, any fervice ; or, if it could, would do, at the fame time, much harm to mankind, by taking away diftinction, where it ought to be preferved. But as the defire of leaving behind us an honourable reputation, when we have earned it, is naturally a ftrong principle in virtuous breafts, and a very ufeful one to human fociety, it fhould be carefully cherifhed, by allowing to every degree of real defert its proper acknowledgment, and uſing the only means that we have, of making thofe yet alive, who in every other refpect are dead to us. The true immortality God beftows on his faithful fervants, and them alone, in another world : but we fhould give in this all that we are able, the poor fhadow of it, an honeft fame, to as many as are entitled to it, in their refpective ſhares. Whoever hath gone through life with only a benevolent heart and upright intention, though it be in a private rank, hath merit confiderable enough not to be ſoon forgotten. And in proportion as other things concur to raife the characters of men, they fhould be refpected both more and longer. Whenever, therefore, the virtues of any perfons have been adorned by nature with uncommon accomplifhments, and by themſelves with valuable acquifitions : when they have been called out by Providence into the view of mankind ; have refiſted the greateſt temptations ; appeared equal, without effort, to the greateſt difficul-

ties ; filled with diffusive beneficence the largest sphere of public life, and yet paid the most accurate and amiable regard to the various duties of private relations : when they have spent their days in this manner, and finished them in the manner described before, then the prudent in heart will regret their loss with the deepest concern, and *have them in everlasting remembrance* *. But,

III. We may learn, from a considerate meditation on the examples of mortality, very useful instructions for our behaviour, not only with respect to the deceased, but those whom they have left behind, any way peculiarly related to them.

The death of a wise and good, of a near and affectionate friend, is unspeakably the greatest of all calamities. One single stroke of this kind may destroy almost the whole comfort of our lives at once ; and a very few of them leave us in the most dreadful of solitudes ; destitute of any one to entrust with full confidence, amidst numbers to suspect and fear ; destitute of help against our own frailties and infirmities ; and vastly more miserable for having been happy. Whoever is capable of these reflections, if he allows himself time to make them, will sincerely pity all that have suffered such a loss, and equally esteem all that shew they are sensible of it. Right affections are the very foundation of a right character ; and affection continued to be expressed, in the manner it ought, for friends and relations at and after their deaths, carries in it an evident mark both of sincerity and strength. When, instead of drawing from the mournful scene, persons fix their hearts entirely upon it ; fulfil to the very utmost the whole *labour of love* †, to which Providence then calls them ; and, after all proves fruitless, transfer their concern in a proper degree to the support of their partners in sorrow, each evidencing their consciousness of the others worth, by a mutual tenderness that goes through them all : the knowledge of this behaviour, in any station of life, must needs fill our minds with great honour and regard for such as feel affliction in so exemplary a manner ; and dispose us effectually to avoid whatever may increase their sufferings, and do whatever may alleviate them. But especially those whom we are bound to
reverence

* Psal. cxii. 6.

† Heb. vi. 10.

reverence at all times, we should reverence doubly in their distress; and those for whom at all times we are bound to pray, we should then with uncommon earnestness recommend to *the God of all comfort* *. Let us, therefore, accordingly at present beseech him, that he would be merciful to that house which is now peculiarly *the house of mourning*: that he would be merciful to these nations which have the justest cause to share in all their griefs; that he would *turn from us those evils that we most righteously have deserved*; and continue to us those blessings, which through his infinite goodness we enjoy. Grant these our petitions, gracious God, for the sake of thy ever-blessed Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

* 2 Cor. i. 3.

S E R M O N CXXIX.

(Preached in the Parish Church of St. Bridget, London, before the Right Honourable the Lord-Mayor, &c. on Monday in Easter Week, 1738.)

ON CHRISTIAN BENEFICENCE AND LIBERALITY.

I PET. iv. 10.

As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

THE inducements that we have to relieve the miseries, and promote the happiness of our fellow-creatures, are, God be thanked, both many in number, and of various kinds. Our hearts naturally incline us to it; our reason approves of it as right. The more we cultivate kind dispositions, the truer peace we possess within; and the greater capacity of social happiness, the sweetest part of the enjoyment of life. Willingness to do good, is always rewarded with the esteem of mankind; and selfishness of temper, the constant object of every ones aversion. We have frequent experience in ourselves what suffering is; and are therefore inexcusable, if we overlook it in others. We live in a world, where, if it were not for the exercise of mercy and pity, the face of things would look dreadful with miserable objects; and the multitudes of persons driven to despair, make society unsafe. Besides, we know the vicissitudes of human affairs; and are nearly concerned to encourage, by our example, that spirit of goodness and compassion, of which we or ours may, on one occasion or another, easily come to have great need.

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These are powerful motives to beneficence; and yet the influence of them is too commonly exceeding small. The hearts of some persons have but little sensibility; and those of others, a very confined and partial one. Some content themselves with talking of benevolence, instead of cultivating it; or with the inward feeling of good affections, instead of exerting them; and others give scope to their wrong inclinations, and their right ones, promiscuously; and so easily do more harm in the world, than good. To speculative reasonings but few persons attend; and fewer still are governed by them in practice. Their liableness to the common accidents of life, men either forget amidst the pleasures of it, or turn into an argument for attending the more closely to their own interests. As for reputation, a few acts of goodness, well managed, will obtain as much of it as they are concerned about. Or, if they cannot be esteemed, they may hope at least to be courted. And even if they fail of this, they can affect to despise it, and appear, notwithstanding, happy; some in their wealth, some in their voluptuousness.

Our wise and good Maker hath therefore not left us to the influence of these motives only; but, as he saw it necessary, that in all our ways we should be directed by regard to him; so he hath added infinite force to the above-mentioned considerations, by giving us the knowledge of himself, and teaching us to look on them as evidences of his will. He undoubtedly designed the good things of this world, not for the gratification of a few of his creatures; but for the benefit of all. And he hath divided them unequally amongst us; not that one part of the human race should sink under misery and want, and the other look down with contempt upon them; but that pity and gratitude should be mutually exercised, and the pleasure of doing and receiving good, felt among men; that the poor should be serviceable to the rich; they, in return, kind to the poor; and both united in the bonds of mutual good-will, from a sense of their mutual dependency. These, it appears from the knowledge that we have of his nature, must have been his intentions. The same thing appears further from the nature he hath given us, and the circumstances in which he hath placed us. But that no sort of evidence of it might be wanting, he hath made known to the world

world his pleasure by exprefs revelation alfo ; requiring of us all *to do good, and to communicate* *, both as we are fervants, bound in every thing to obey him ; and as we are ftewards, appointed and entrusted by him for this very purpofe.

Let us therefore confider, with due ferioufnefs,

I. What general influence it fhould have upon us, that we are *ftewards of the manifold grace of God*.

II. What influence in particular with refpect to thofe methods of charity, which are the occafion of our prefent meeting.

I. Let us confider the general influence. Every thing, which God hath done for the good of his creatures, is *grace* or favour to them ; and every thing, which he has placed in our hands for their good, is grace of which we are ftewards. All the means and opportunities we have of making the world, or any part of it, better or happier ; by our knowledge or wealth, by our power or intereft, our care and pains, our friendly behaviour or good example, are given us in truft, to be fo exercifed. How *manifold* thefe are, upon the whole, it is not perhaps eafy for us to be fully fenfible ; but we fhould each of us think very carefully, what his own fhare of them is, and wherein it confifts. For no one is without his *talent*, though fome have more committed to them than others ; and they who have leaft, will be expected to improve what they have † ; as our Saviour's parable very awfully fhews. The pooreft perfon in the world, is capable of being ufeful, fome way, to his fellow-creatures ; and the greateft can never be above the obligation of imitating, to their power, the beneficence of their Creator. They who are engaged in bufinefs, far from having their attention confined to themfelves, have ufually, by the very means of their bufinefs, peculiar advantages both for knowing and fupplying the wants of others. And fuch as have no particular employment, have only the privilege of a freer choice, what part they will take in that general one affigned to us all, of doing good.

Since then we are appointed, each in his proper ftation, difpensers and *ftewards of the manifold grace of God*, it concerns

* Heb. xiii. 16.

† Matth. xxv. 14.—30.

cerns us to behave as faithful ones: not to intercept the streams of the divine bounty; nor confine, to our own gratification, what our Maker hath designed for the common benefit of all around us. He hath not indeed fixed the proportions of any kind of charity; for circumstances vary so infinitely, that general rules concerning such matters are impossible. And this latitude should not give anxiety to any good mind; for we serve a most equitable master. But neither should it give encouragement to bad minds; and make them imagine, that where nothing is ascertained, they may do just as little as they please. For God will expect from every one, what may be reasonably expected from them; and hath left this matter at large, that we may shew, not our backwardness to serve him, but our zeal. Imprudent zeal he never approves; but goodness, confined within the bounds of discretion, is always more acceptable to him, in proportion as it is more abundant. And, though not every failure in degree shall expose us to punishment; yet *he which soweth sparingly, shall reap also sparingly: and he which soweth bountifully, shall reap also bountifully* *.

However unactive therefore we may naturally be; yet, as persons entrusted by the Lord of all, it imports us greatly to be diligent. For industry is a valuable part of faithfulness; and *slothful servants* will be considered, in the day of judgment as *wicked* ones †. Some ways of doing good may possibly be less pleasing to us; some persons our prejudices, our passions, or interests, would tempt us to overlook, rather than serve; and some things, that are only seeming instances of benevolence, we should be willing to mistake for real ones; and indulge a false good nature, without regard to consequences, however bad. But when we consider, that in all these cases we are to act for God, this makes a very great change in the view of things; and may both oblige us at some times *to do with our might* ‡, what perhaps we could least have wished; and restrain us, at others, from doing at all, what injudiciously we should have desired the most. Another important use of looking upon ourselves in this light is, that how great soever our talents may be, and how right soever the use that

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* 2 Cor. ix. 6.

† Matth. xxv. 26.

‡ Eccl. ix. 10.

we make of them ; it must still be the strongest reason possible for humility, one of the most excellent of virtues, to think, that all we have is given us, and all we do is but *ministering*. Then, at the same time that our being entrusted will teach us these things, our being jointly entrusted will teach us another ; never to invade each other's province, nor *stretch ourselves beyond our measure* * ; but as *God hath distributed to every man so to walk* † : for he is not the author of confusion, but of peace ‡. God is the judge, and a much better surely than we, what employment is fittest for each of his servants ; and how enterprizing soever any of us may be now, or how discontented soever with the narrowness of our own sphere of action, we may have cause enough to be glad at last, that no more was committed to our care. Yet these reflexions must not be carried to such a length, as to let the business of our common master suffer, under pretence of its belonging, not to us, but our fellow-servant ; when there is no impropriety, but only somewhat more labour or expence, in stepping a little out of our way, to prevent the ill consequences of another's neglect. It must be owned a difficult matter, not to mistake in these cases on one side or the other ; but involuntary mistakes will never be imputed to us. It must be owned a very serious thing, to be *stewards of God* : but it is a very noble one, to be employed under our heavenly Father in the work, that he delights in most ; and for the happiness of our brethren, perhaps to all eternity. If indeed we are found, instead of this, either hiding the talents committed to us §, or wasting our master's goods ||, or misusing those to whom we ought to have ministered ¶ ; then miserable will our condition be, when God shall say to us, *Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward* **. But on the other hand, our comfort is, that a sincere endeavour to discharge our office as we ought, whatever our difficulties, or whatever our imperfections be, shall entitle us to the sentence, *Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord* ††.

With

* 2 Cor. x. 14.

§ Matth. xxv. 18.

** Luke xvi. 2.

† 1 Cor. vii. 17.

|| Luke xvi. 1.

‡† Matth. xxv. 23.

‡ 1 Cor. xiv. 33.

¶ Matth. xxiv. 49.

With the impression therefore of these reflexions upon our minds, let us now proceed to inquire,

II. What influence the thought, that we are *stewards of the manifold grace of God*, should have upon us, with respect to those particular methods of doing good, which are the occasion of our present meeting.

Now these are of three sorts, which indeed comprehend almost the whole of public charity: places of maintenance and instruction for children; hospitals for the sick; and houses of correction and work for the dissolute and idle.

Relieving poor parents from the burden of a family, which they are unable to support, must needs be a most welcome charity to them; and is evidently a very useful one to the public; for it tends to the future increase of the community, as well as to make the present members of it happy. And teaching poor children religion and virtue, one should think were plainly a beneficial thing too. For let it prove ineffectual as often as it will; they must be a little more likely to abstain from what is wrong, for being taught what is right. Some principles, some notions of life and behaviour, they will learn; which then would you have them learn, good or bad? They may indeed possibly learn bad things mixed with good, under the notion of religion. But considering the purity, in which religion is professed amongst us, there cannot well be much of this kind; and there needs not be any thing. Some persons, however, appear to have great fears of superstition; and no fears of any thing else. But do they really find in fact, that this is the reigning and dangerous error of the present age? Is it with superstition, that your servants, and your children as they grow up, and the generality of the people, are infected; or is it not with profligateness: such open and avowed contempt of the laws of God and man, of all sobriety and order, as this nation hath never known before, nor can long subsist under an increase of it? But if you are in earnest afraid of superstition, be afraid where you have cause of fear. There is a real, and a dreadful superstition gaining ground, that of the church of *Rome*. And the more ignorant men are of all religion, and the more prejudiced against their own form and their own teachers of religion; the more easily they are won over into that most corrupt and

formidable communion. Think then, I intreat you, what would our condition be, should ever the main part of this nation become, one half Papists, and the other Profligates ! For as to the scheme of virtue without religion ; even if it could be put in practice, yet there is a God, and he ought to be feared ; and there is a support in piety, of which mankind ought not to be deprived. But whoever knows any thing of the world, must see, that such a scheme can never be put in practice : that human nature hath daily need, both to be restrained from evil, and excited to good, in cases where none but religious motives can do either effectually. And as they have been constantly found necessary in all ages and countries whatever ; so they are certainly of the most indispensable necessity, where incentives to vice are in the greatest abundance, and liberty is the least controlled by law.

But to return. Together with the general rules of their duty, these children are taught such other knowledge, as may qualify them for employments fitted to their station ; and then put out to such employments ; with a further assistance, where it is requisite, of some little matter to begin with, towards gaining a livelihood. And this also surely must be of public benefit. Were they indeed either taken or kept away from other business, more useful, or in which hands are more wanted ; were they raised, without visible merit, above their original rank, into one of less labour or more knowledge, to the prejudice of those, who were by birth their superiors : such things would be just objections, though not to the institution of these schools, yet to the management of them. But when only the parents are kept from distress, and the children from idleness or wicked courses ; when care is taken, to choose them for a condition suitable to that, for which they are designed ; and neither in their manner of living, nor their instruction, to set them above that ; every one will allow, it would be excellent private charity, to do this for a child ; and why not as good public charity, to do it for many children ; since the greater the number is, the less in proportion the expence ?

The second method of doing good, before us at present, is that of hospitals for the sick. And whatever objections may be made against other benefactions to the poor, there can be

none against restoring ease and health to them; against giving them those helps, which their distressed families cannot give; and enabling them to be useful again to themselves, and to the public. Now hospitals are infinitely the best means to this necessary end. They are a sure way of detecting counterfeits: they preserve the sick from unskilful hands: they are so many public schools, where the knowledge of medicine is taught, in the most effectual manner, for the common benefit of mankind. They relieve multitudes, who either cannot demand, or cannot obtain, parochial relief; and they do it, beyond comparison, in the surest, the speediest, and the cheapest manner that can be. So that, were we to suppose even great mismanagements in hospitals; they would still remain preferable to all other methods of providing for the sick; and yet the numbers and characters of the governors of our present hospitals, secure them, as far as may be, against any mismanagement at all. Another advantage is, that ever so little given to this kind of charity, hath its proportionable good effect; and the diseases and accidents, which befall the lower part of the world, are so many and frequent, that ever so much given may easily be employed. Then it well deserves to be considered further, that sickness affords a favourable opportunity for good impressions; and therefore most important service may be done to poor creatures in these places, by shewing them from experience the bad consequences of vicious lives, and the good ones of regularity; by giving them strong impressions of the excellency of compassion and mercy; at the time when they are partaking of it; and awakening them to a sense of what their condition requires of them, and their eternal happiness depends upon. But the benefit of hospitals hath been so very well explained to the world of late*, and so generally acknowledged, that I need only add a word concerning one sort of them, that for the diseased in mind.

These poor creatures are made by their disorder, whilst it continues, entirely useless to society; and many of them, at the same time, exceedingly miserable in themselves, by the

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* See Dr. Alured Clarke's sermon before the governors of the county-hospital at Winchester, and an account of the establishment of that hospital, published in 1737.

frightful or the gloomy train of ideas that possesses their minds, and the vehement passions that so frequently agitate them. Now, when persons in low circumstances fall into this unhappy state, as many of them do, their friends are more incapable of taking care of them than in any other case whatever; and there is no way of attempting their cure, which can possibly be attended with such hope of success, as placing them in hospitals appropriated to this purpose. Nay, indeed, when there appears no prospect of a cure at all, to provide for them as incurables, is a most useful and excellent act of humanity: and the beginnings lately made of a provision of this sort, well deserve encouragement, and peculiarly want it.

The only kind of charity which remains to be mentioned now, is that of houses of correction and work for the dissolute and idle. The terror which these places strike is one great benefit, as it prevents, at once, both crimes and the consequences of them. But where that proves ineffectual, the next advantage of such houses is, that offenders can be immediately secured in them. Removed out of the way of endangering the properties, the lives, the virtue of others, and made to feel, that their attempt of gaining a livelihood by easier methods than honest people do, shall only subject them to harder labour and deserved punishment. Many of them, we are assured, have been brought, by these means, to a just sense of their interest and their duty: very many more, we have sad experience, much need to have this kindness done them. And we cannot but know the importance, both to them and to ourselves, of checking the growth of wickedness, before it is quite too late to think of attempting it.

These then being the methods of charity now before you, consider well what obligations you are under, as *stewards of God* for the good of your fellow-creatures, to assist in directing and supporting them.

Such, in the first place, as are qualified to govern and direct any of these institutions, are bound, in conscience, not to let so excellent designs receive prejudice, for want of a succession of fit persons to put them in execution: for they may well spare a little time, both from pleasure and from business of other kinds, to employ it in a manner so productive of happiness

happiness to the world and to themselves. And such as have actually taken this good work upon them, must ever remember, that they are now become stewards of the charity of men as well as the bounty of God; and their faithfulness in the discharge of their trust is engaged to both. They whose constant attendance cannot be expected, should at least acquaint themselves so far with the management of things, as to know, and be able to assure others, that it is, in the main at least, such as it ought; for in many cases this alone may be a valuable service. And all who profess to enter further into the conduct of affairs, should seriously, and frequently, and impartially consider, what can be reformed in these charities, and what can be improved. A meddling spirit, fond of disturbing things that are well, either to no good purpose, or none that can be obtained, is indeed a very mischievous one; but prudent, peaceable endeavours, to make every thing as perfect as it can be made, are of incredible use. The work in which you are engaged, is a very important one: and a small defect of attention, a little wrong bias or mistaken judgment, may produce extremely unhappy effects; may diminish considerably the benefit of these excellent designs, and make even *your good evil spoken of**. The support of voluntary charities depends entirely on their reputation; and therefore it concerns you greatly to avoid, not only every thing blameable, but every thing suspicious; and to *cut off occasion from them which desire occasion*† to find fault; *providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but in the sight of all men*‡. But more especially give me leave to recommend to you, that as you are entrusted for the good of your fellow-creatures, you would have great regard to their eternal good; and that, as you are employed for the service of God, you would express your concern for his honour, by endeavouring conscientiously to imprint a sense of religion and virtue upon all that come under your care in these places. It is the want of religion and virtue that principally occasions this dreadful number of distresses and disorders in the world: and so long as the cause subsists, the effect will follow. Let your children, therefore, be carefully bred up to piety, without superstition

* Rom. xiv. 16.

† 2 Cor. xi. 12.

‡ 2 Cor. viii. 21.

stitution or uncharitableness ; to loyalty and honesty, to humility and industry. Let your sick be instructed and admonished, suitably to their capacities, their present condition, and past behaviour. And let the correction of your offenders be made as medicinal as it can ; and a charitable care for reclaiming them, by proper expostulations and friendly advice, be joined with whatever severity it is necessary they should undergo. There are undoubtedly amongst them great objects of pity ; persons of whom there is no cause to despair ; and surely these, as far as it is possible, should have some distinguished regard shewn them. But so much regard at least should be shewn to them all, and to the public at the same time, if we have any concern for its welfare, as never to suffer places, appointed for the punishment of wickedness, to become schools for learning it.

And now, having taken upon me to say thus much to you, it is but justice to add, that exhortations by no means imply distrust. *Having confidence in thy obedience, saith St. Paul to Philemon, I write unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say* *. And never can there be better ground for a confidence of this kind than at present ; when these charities are conducted by so large a number of good, and wise, and experienced men, under the inspection of a magistracy so worthy of honour ; and over which presides a person †, whose uncommon abilities we all see exercised every day, for the promotion of religion and virtue, of the peace and good order, the welfare and happiness of this great city, with the most exemplary disinterestedness, and the truest prudence, the most active zeal, and the tenderest humanity.

I proceed, therefore, now, with great satisfaction, from the duty of managing these charities well, to that of supporting them. And one way of supporting them is, by speaking of them with the esteem which they deserve. These public institutions, and some of them more especially, have had vehement accusations brought against them by many persons. But stay to inquire, and hear, before you condemn. You may possibly judge wrong concerning what ought to be done, and you may very probably be misinformed concerning what

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* Philem. ver. 21.

† Sir John Barnard.

is done. Things which have happened very seldom, if at all, may be told as happening frequently. Mistakes corrected long ago, may be charged as continuing still. Inconveniencies may be unjustly heightened; advantages unjustly depreciated. Should this be so; and should the things, against which you are declaiming, be all the while excellently good ones, think only what harm you are doing to mankind. Perhaps, indeed, nay certainly they are not perfect: but are they not highly useful? Or if not, cannot they be made so? If they can, use your endeavours that they may. Shew a good meaning, and you will acquire an influence. But even should you after all be unsuccessful, still reflect a second time, is it not more eligible, that these institutions should continue as they are, than fall to ruin? For, supposing some better way might be contrived, is there any certainty, is there any prospect, of this better way being taken? And if not, never pull down, till you are likely to build again.

But affording good words alone to charity is very insufficient. As faithful stewards of the divine bounty, you must communicate of the wealth also, which is placed in your hands for that purpose; *and minister, as of the ability which God giveth* *. The importance of supporting these methods of doing good, so far as it appears from their general nature, you have already heard. But when you are acquainted also with their large and increasing extent, and their necessary dependence on new benefactions every year, these things will be weighty additional motives to your liberality: and I intreat your compassionate attention to the following report of them.

Here the Report was read.

YOU have now heard the most forcible arguments that you well can hear, for contributing plentifully to the charities before you. Eight hundred vagrants and disorderly persons, confined and employed, relieved and corrected, for their own reformation, and your security; thirteen hundred poor children maintained; taught their duty to God and man, and qualified

* 1 Pet. iv. 11.

qualified for usefulness to the public: thirteen thousand sick persons, of whom care hath been taken in their sickness. And these excellent establishments, you perceive at the same time, cannot subsist without continual help; though, would but your bounty afford the means for it, they are capable of being greatly enlarged. Still a provision is wanted for multitudes of poor children; and no small part of them are either taught, or reduced, to get a livelihood by wickedness and dishonesty. Still too many offenders, of more advanced years, infest your streets. And a very large proportion of the sick, that apply to your hospitals, are forced to be rejected, and left in their misery, for want of room to receive them, or income to support them. Think then, what is incumbent on you in relation to these things.

There are but two reasons, and they are both very bad ones, that hinder men from being charitable according to their power: either covetousness makes them unwilling; or expensiveness makes them imagine they are unable.

If the former influences you consider well, that your happiness for ever depends on doing your duty; but your happiness even here doth not depend on enlarging your fortunes. You may, if you will form yourselves to it, enjoy great satisfaction in doing good. But what felicity can you possibly find, either in the consciousness of having, or the vanity of being known to have, ever so much wealth more than you have occasion for? And besides, if the enjoyment of *man's life* did consist in the abundance of the things which he possessed*; charity may often be so contrived by prudence, as not to diminish wealth; and is often so blessed by heaven, as greatly to increase it. I am sensible, that you have heard these things, till some of you perhaps have brought yourselves by degrees to be very little moved by them: but remember God will expect, that having been reminded of them so frequently, you should regard them the more.

And if it be expensiveness, that withholds you from charity, in this case also think with yourselves: for which purpose it is, that your Maker hath intrusted you? For vices and follies, or for pity and mercy? You may indeed plead,
that

* Luke xii. 13.

that luxury, by the numbers it employs, is perhaps the most extensive beneficence. But this is a poor pretence, evidently calculated to make yourselves easy in acting wrong. Undoubtedly the wisdom of providence hath contrived, that many, who will do no good in any other way, shall however do some in this. But then it is usually done to those who need it least. A number of persons, well able to take care of themselves otherwise, are maintained, part in idleness, part in professions of no manner of use; whilst the true objects of compassion, the infirm and helpless, are left unregarded, to suffer and perish. Luxury therefore contributes nothing to answer the intent of the charities before us. And even those, for whom it doth provide, it teaches at the same time to ruin themselves by the imitation of it. And in proportion as it prevails, it destroys every where, both virtue and happiness, public and private. But the numberless evils of this most fatal vice cannot be enlarged on now; and if the very little good, which it doth, were very much more; yet, as no one will pretend to say, that this good was the motive to his expensiveness; it can never be a defence of it. We must not therefore think to make our extravagance an excuse for the defect of our alms; or hope in the least to mend our plea, by calling those things necessaries of life, which are indeed very blameable superfluities.

Let therefore both the frugal and the expensive man seriously consider, one, what proportion his charity bears to his increase; the other, to his profusions; and each think of justifying themselves, not to the world, but to God.

Possibly it may seem a good reason to some, for their own neglect of the poor, that the law makes provision for them. And it is certainly an honour to the law that it doth; but no honour to us, that it needs do it. Besides, there are very many cases of great distress, to which legal provision is neither easily, nor properly extended; nor can it give by any means so plentiful relief, as should be given to the greater part of those to whom it may extend. But suppose the law capable of doing every thing that needs be done; what would be the consequence of leaving every thing to it? That we should lose entirely the means, which now we have, of proving to the world, and to ourselves, the goodness of our own

hearts ; and of making an undoubted free-will offering to God, out of what he hath given us. Persons of bad minds may indeed take occasion to neglect the poor, from our willingness to relieve them ; and thus, by their fault, the burden may fall heavier upon us than it ought. But then God, who hath entrusted us, not only in conjunction with others to do our share, but separately by ourselves to do what we can, *is not unrighteous to forget this our labour of love* * : but will take abundant care, that whatever we bear cheerfully on his account, far from giving us cause of complaint, shall assuredly be matter of great joy to us in the end.

Think then attentively of these considerations. They are not proposed to you, for raising a sudden warmth of affection, and serving a present turn ; it is to your coolest reason, that this address is made. Reflect in retirement on what you have heard. Act upon deliberate conviction, act from a settled principle, in what you do ; from that sublime principle, to which St. *Peter* directs in the next verse after the text ; *that God may be glorified in all things, through Jesus Christ* : that you may express to him your sense of the duty and gratitude, which you owe him ; that you may improve your own hearts, by imitating the goodness, which you honour ; that you may convince mankind of the excellency of the Christian doctrine. Consider yourselves, in this view also, as the *stewards of God* ; as intrusted for the service and promotion of his gospel. For be assured, such important and astonishing truths as that comprehends, and you have lately heard out of it, were not made known to you, with a design, that you should be indifferent about them ; but deeply affected by them yourselves, and seriously diligent to engage the attention of others to them. If then you have any zeal for the faith, which you profess, as heaven knows there never was more need ; shew men, by its effects, what it is ; and give demonstration to the world, how far the true charity of a good Christian goes beyond the boasted benevolence of unbelievers, invite men by these means to a better opinion of religion ; encourage them by the same to a steadier practice of it. *Be watchful, and strengthen, by every method you can, the things*
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* Heb. vi. 10.

which remain, and are ready to die *: but particularly make provision in these excellent ways, which are now proposed to you, for the instruction of the ignorant, the conversion of the vicious, the spiritual improvement, as well as temporal relief of the sick; that so *the administration* of your charity *may not only supply the want of the saints, but be abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God* †.

* Rev. iii. 2.

† 2 Cor. ix. 12.

S E R M O N CXXX.

(Preached before the House of Lords, in the Abbey-Church
of *Westminster*, on *Thursday, May 29. 1739*)

ON SPECULATIVE FAITH, AND INGRATITUDE TO GOD IN PRACTICE.

PSALM cvi. 12, 13.

*Then believed they his words, they sang his praise: they soon
forgot his works, they waited not for his counsel.*

THE same wise and good being, who hath fitted the whole frame of this world to the various wants of his creatures, hath fitted the events of things to our reformation and moral improvement. Were they to be considered as events only, it would be folly not to learn from them; but as they are lessons intended by heaven for our instruction, it is impiety also. The dispensations of providence, in which we are least interested, may teach us a great deal by analogy, both concerning the consequences of our behaviour, and the temper of our hearts: for we seldom apprehend how fatally we are capable of erring, till we see how other persons have acted before us, and what hath followed. But those transactions of former times, which extend their influence down to us, as they naturally excite a greater attention, so they generally reward it with more plentiful and more important matter of observation; and if we will not be made wise by the experience of our predecessors, the only doubt is, whether possibly our own may not teach us too late.

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The two great methods of providential instruction are mercies and punishments. Undoubtedly our Maker would always prefer the first, if it were not that enjoying them for some time without interruption, tempts us unaccountably to overlook both his goodness, and our own duty arising from it. Sometimes, indeed, they who forget God in their prosperity, are moved by their afflictions only to murmur against him: but for the most part sufferings have a better effect; recall to our minds both our condition and our conduct. And it might be hoped, that the very deep impressions which divine judgments make, would naturally be lasting; or however, that when forgiveness had succeeded chastisement, the united force of terror and gratitude would be perpetual. To recollect our past deliverances, and dwell upon the thoughts of our present happiness, appears too pleasing an employment to grow wearisome. Considering both as evidences of God's delight to do us good, must surely heighten our relish of them; and preserving in memory our obligation to a proper return, besides its being agreeable to ingenuous minds, one should imagine, would be sufficiently recommended to us, by our knowing that the continuance of our blessings depends on this condition.

But mankind are strangely different in fact from what speculation may represent them. Be the advantages of their condition ever so great, many will attend only to its inconveniences; and seem as if they had rather be miserable, than not be ungrateful. Others are too intent on the enjoyment of their felicity, ever to think to whom they owe it; or think too much of the visible means, to remember the invisible author. And unhappily, they who have the liveliest sense of the goodness of God, seldom retain it long: *they sing his praise, and soon forget his works.* Favours received personally by ourselves, wear out of our minds in a very little time: but mercies derived to us from a former age, though continuing to subsist in full force, though perhaps improved, affect us no otherwise than the blessing of constant health doth; which tempts many to be irregular, for one whom it makes thankful. Then, to complete the unhappiness, some who preserve the most lasting memory of divine favours, remember them often partially, and to bad purposes; deduce

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from them wrong conclusions, and are led by them into unjustifiable behaviour. Though they do not *forget his works*, *they wait not for his counsel*, but inconsiderately follow their own imaginations; or if instruction forces itself upon them, *they will not abide it**; nor bear to be restrained, even by the voice of Heaven.

Now, the obvious method of securing events of importance, both from oblivion and misconstruction, is, by appointing stated and solemn commemorations of them. God himself hath done this, to preserve a just sense of his works of creation and redemption; but the celebration of his providential goodness he hath left, as it was natural, to human care. And serious care ought to be taken; as, on the one hand, that institutions of this kind be neither debased to low occasions, nor perverted to ill uses, so on the other, that *they whom the Lord hath redeemed and delivered from the hand of the enemy, may offer unto him the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and tell out his works with gladness; exalt him in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the seat of the elders*†.

This is the duty which we are now assembled to perform; and the two things requisite to perform it as we ought, are,

I. To consider the nature of the blessing which we commemorate:

II. The behaviour to which it directs us.

I. In speaking of the blessings on this day restored to us, the preceding evils must unavoidably be mentioned; and all persons ought to bear with the mention of what all contributed to and shared in. To whom the chief load of guilt was imputable, the public voice hath most justly declared; but every order of men was blameable, and every order punished. First, a zeal excessively angry, for it must be acknowledged, was shewn in the church, against a very provoking sect of zealots; and illegal powers were exercised, to a dangerous degree, in the state, when the bounds of legal power were less clearly fixed. Then fears and resentments carried good men too far; and gave bad men an opportunity of leading them insensibly further still, by very wicked arts; till they were neither sure of retreating with safety, nor yet could go forward

* So the old Translation.

† Ps. cvii. 2, 22, 32.

forward without great guilt. Concessions were made them, in some cases, too large; in most, if not all, very sufficient. But these came too late. The minds of men were exasperated, and confidence in each other lost; so that, instead of reconciling, they only gave ground of advantage for adding new demands, which the makers of them well knew could not be granted. Insisting, however, that they should, from discontents they broke out into tumults, and tumults soon heightened into open rebellion. To have lived in *these beginnings of sorrows* * must have been very dreadful; but how much more, when discord had brought forth its perfect work; had involved the three nations in bloodshed, and the numberless distresses that belong to civil wars. After infinite sacrilege and devastation, committed under colour of religion and freedom, war indeed ceased for a time; but the fruits of war continued. The primitive form of our ecclesiastical government was illegally abolished; the universities, the clergy, the body of the people most cruelly oppressed; till one part of the conquerors, attempting to extend their oppression over the rest, they took a desperate resolution, with which they persuaded each other Heaven had inspired them, to establish themselves by overturning the whole. Then the majesty of the crown, the honours of the nobility, the privileges of the commons, fell a promiscuous sacrifice, as the church had done before, to enthusiastic fury. Fresh commotions, and a new effusion of blood, attended this catastrophe. The subverters of lawful authority by force, underwent repeated subversions of their own one by another; the patrons of unbounded liberty sunk under the dominion of absolute tyranny; the asserters of an imaginary purity in religion, promoted its being defiled with pernicious corruptions; and, by a most instructive severity of Providence, all in their turns were made to *eat of the fruit of their own way, and were filled with their own devices* †, to so surprising a degree of exactness, that there was not perhaps any one ill thing which either side did, but the justice of God returned it visibly upon them.

Such was the state of our ancestors for many years; groaning under their present evils, and their *hearts failing them for fear,*

* Mark xiii. 8.

† Prov. i. 31.

fear, and for looking after those things which were coming on the earth *. But most unexpectedly, when all attempts for restoring our government and laws had proved ineffectual; when the few remaining defenders of them had neither strength of their own, nor hope of assistance from abroad; when their opposers had all the power of the nation in their hands; and, however divided amongst themselves, were engaged by principle and interest, by fear and hatred, to support their common cause, then did God *bow the heart of his people, even as the heart of one man* †, to recal their exiled sovereign, and re-establish their ancient constitution in church and state. *The merciful and gracious Lord hath so done his marvellous works, that they ought to be had in remembrance* ‡. *Praised be the Lord daily; even the God who helpeth us, and poureth his benefits upon us* §.

But great as this deliverance was, yet every fibre of such *a root of bitterness* || could not be extirpated immediately: and a new evil *sprung up* from it, which once more threatened us with ruin. Our princes, deprived in their tender years of the instruction and example of their royal father, banished into the midst of temptation, and seeing and feeling the terrible effects of a pretended or misguided zeal for our liberties and religion, returned to us with dispositions unfavourable to both. These, in the reign of the younger of them, had reduced us to the very extremity of danger; when the mercy of Providence again interposing, delivered us; and not only completed, but we hope hath secured to us for ever, the whole blessing of the restoration, under our present happy establishment. Our sovereign, we are sure, hath the sincerest regard both to our civil and religious rights; his posterity have deeply imbibed the same generous principle; and all that we can have to fear must be from ourselves.

II. Let us, therefore, proceed to consider, what behaviour the great event which we commemorate prescribes; what is the *counsel* which God hath given us by it.

The greatest part of the instruction indeed must arise from our sufferings; but the whole power of making advantage of it,

* Luke xxi. 26.

§ Ib. lxxviii. 19.

† 2 Sam. xix. 14.

|| Heb. xii. 15.

‡ Psal. cxi. 4.

it arises from our deliverance. And our sufferings being caused by mutual vehemence, and our deliverance being effected in peace; both may well dispose us to a mild consideration of what they teach. To make invectives now, against persons who are gone long ago to answer for their sins before God, can be of little benefit; and to charge others rashly with inheriting their faults, may be great injustice; besides that generosity should restrain one side from bitterness; and decency, the other. Undoubtedly caution, to prevent the repetition of past evils, is highly requisite. But where so large a proportion of them was brought about by such as meant it not, the most needful caution is, that we each of us avoid falling into the same error; that we recollect, whatever our station or profession be, not only the injuries, which our predecessors in the same underwent, but chiefly those which they did; and apply our knowledge of former times, not to exasperate others, but to amend or warn ourselves. This is the use, which ought to be made of the plainest parts of the history; and much more should we take care, not to grow warm about the doubtful ones; but allowing men to differ from us, as they may very innocently, concerning the characters and conduct of persons and parties formerly, endeavour all to agree in the one material point, our own conduct now. And surely the period of time before our view, suggests very plainly most important directions to every sort of persons amongst us.

It must remind the governors of the established church, that rigorous treatment of such as dissent from it, and endeavours to extend their own authority, or influence, beyond reasonable bounds, are methods as contrary to prudence, as they are to religion; that neither learning, nor piety, nor eminence in other virtues, will be able to support them, without a suitable degree of humility and forbearance; but that care to be inoffensive, and diligence to be useful, are their true strength. And at the same time, they, who are prejudiced against the established church, ought to remember, that its ruin was attended with that of the whole constitution: that there followed in its place, first another church-power, allowed to be much more terrible, than all manner of confusion; and this continued, till providence re-established us on

the old foundation. So that even in those times their schemes were far from producing any good; and it cannot be fitting to revive them now, when, God be thanked, there never was so little of the bad spirit, which they pretend to fear. We only desire protection and support in serving the cause of religion and virtue; and it is a very unkind and discouraging return made us, for avoiding the faults imputed to our predecessors; if some will not see it, and others will give us no proof of their seeing it.

From the occurrences of the same times, counsellors of princes ought to learn, that the great interest of the sovereign and their own is, never to bear hard upon the liberties of the people; for they will restore themselves with dangerous force: never to give them jealousy; for too often scarce any thing will remove it: never to despise even their less reasonable complaints; but, as far as it is possible, always promote the public good by methods agreeable to the public inclination. And the several parts of the legislature should learn, each to maintain their own privileges with calm resolution; but to abstain religiously from mutual encroachments: for not only the sacred obligation of justice requires it, but experience hath shewn, that when once the inward balance of a constitution is broken, endless disorders are likely to follow; and no part of the whole is in more danger of suffering more, than that which at first appeared to be the gainer.

But besides the separate admonitions, given by the history of this day to particular sorts of persons; the instruction, which it offers to us all in common, deserves our serious attention.

Much of the misery, undergone by these nations, was owing to that unhappy proneness, which there is in mankind, not only to magnify the real inconveniencies of their condition, but to add imaginary ones to them. And their own ill conduct is always the last thing on which they charge them; that of their superiors usually the first. For these inconveniencies, they flatter themselves in the next place, there must be some remedy; and then, whatever scheme for reformation either their own imagination presents, or any body else suggests, they embrace it immediately, run hastily away with it, and soon grow too vehement, ever to consider, whether it be

not impracticable or ineffectual, unjust or pernicious. Indeed to be absolutely against all changes, is either great folly, or great wickedness. Things may have been wrong constituted originally; they may have degenerated since; they may be attended now with different circumstances; and alterations may both be reasonable to cure present complaints, and necessary to prevent worse disorders. But still, the general presumption should always be in favour of what is established; and no innovations, greater than need, ought ever to be attempted. Interest, opinion, resentment, warmth of temper, place different things before different persons, in very strong lights: too strong perhaps to see them distinctly; at least, to observe every thing connected with them. On these views however they boldly act: heat one another, sometimes by concurrence, sometimes by opposition: doubt nothing in themselves, suspect nothing in those who join with them, pardon nothing in those who differ from them; destroy the quiet of numbers who have not deserved it, as well as their own; and all to do mischief, it may be, instead of good, even though they intend good. For not only projects, that look plausible to such persons, may be very hurtful notwithstanding; perhaps to themselves, perhaps to others, who have an equal right to be considered; but supposing them innocent, supposing them beneficial; yet attempting them rashly, may do unknown harm, should they miscarry; and cost infinitely too dear, should they succeed. If a nation is to be put into a ferment for them; and the multitude called in, to be vehement about matters of which they are no judges: this in itself is a dreadful evil, and may possibly rise to a destructive height. For in some circumstances it is much easier to inflame persons, than to foresee when they will cool; and there is one point of yet greater importance than reforming faults, preserving reverence to authority. If this be once lost, possibly a blameless conduct of affairs, which yet no body can ever promise, may not restore it; and unless it be restored, every thing will be levelled. Sooner or later indeed, God knows how long it may be first, some sort of order must return; but, without the peculiar interposition of a kind Providence, the beautiful order of a free government will not. And it ought to be well considered, that persons, who begin with moderate and

most laudable intentions, may forget themselves, may be entangled with others, may be led or driven into doing what they greatly disapprove ; or may lose all power of stopping mischief, when it is once set to work ; and have nothing left, but to perish with the ship in the storm, which they had helped to raise. These dangers indeed cannot be reasons for complying with every thing ; for in vain will heaven have restored to us our happy form of government, if we suffer it to be a form only. But they are powerful reasons for thinking coolly what deserves opposition, and opposing it with temper : for considering who are the persons really to blame, in what degree upon the whole they are so, and how difficult it is not to be so ; for redressing grievances by no other than regular methods, and waiting for opportunities, not forcing them ; for examining faithfully the purity of our own intentions ; for asking ourselves often, how far we mean to go ; and observing carefully, what those persons aim at, with whom we are engaged ; for weighing well what remedies the public constitution will bear, under what it will be likely to sink ; and seriously recollecting, how great multitudes have their fate involved in that of the whole. There can be no cautions more evidently just than these, though we had not had experience to teach us so awfully, that for want of regarding them in the times now before us, no one scheme ended as it was designed at first. Every thing was proposed to be reformed into perfection ; every thing, instead of that, was completely brought to ruin ; and happy did men think themselves, with very good cause, when at last they were able to get back into the situation, which they had imagined before to be so intolerable. *Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples : and they are written for our admonition* *.

Nor let it be replied, that though the bold attempts for reformation and liberty miscarried then, they may succeed another time. - Let us rather reflect, that though the confusion and slavery, which they introduced, proved but temporary then, the next trial may perpetuate them. Liberty is a blessing of such unspeakable value, that no wonder if the very name of it be dear to men ; but the name misapplied was fatal

* I Cor. x. 11.

fatal to our forefathers, and may be so to us. Licentiousness of speech and writing, a favourite and most entertaining species of liberty to the inconsiderate, had the effects amongst them, which it must have every where; not only of injuring particular persons in the most sensible manner, but of destroying that regard to stations and offices, ranks and orders of men, which must be preserved, or society must be dissolved. For when once contending parties, by their mutual accusations and aspersions, have taught the people to think ill, or meanly, of all persons that are, or can be their governors, what remains for them, but to think in the same manner of government itself, and treat it accordingly? Considering, indeed, how artfully men have learnt to disguise these enormities, there may perhaps be no effectual method of restraining them by law, without very great danger of hurtful consequences from the restraint. But to take this advantage for being guilty of them, is a most ungenerous use of freedom against such as wish it well, and a most unwise one against such as do not. All good men, therefore, should labour unanimously to keep down this bad spirit, each on his own side; for in vain do we exclaim against what we indulge; and to discountenance it so strongly, by expressing their private abhorrence of it, that there may be no reason, and no pretence, if possible, for a public provision against it. Liberty cannot be supported any more than power, but by exercising it with moderation. And they that overturn either, by carrying it to extravagant heights, after such warning as Providence hath given us, must neither expect any remedy, nor much pity.

But indeed there are persons who seem almost to think that liberty cannot be extended too far; that every diminution of authority is so much gain, every increase of it so much loss, to the community. Now, if this be true, laws and government are a public nuisance; and if not, men ought to consider what restraints are requisite, as well as what may be abused; and remember, that a right to do things necessary to be done, must be vested somewhere, and must be exerted. Authority indeed is of a growing nature; but so is aversion to authority: and freedom unrestrained is power unrestrained. No tyrannies have been more insupportable than those of the multitude;

multitude ; nor can any persons be more justly dreaded, than they who declaim for liberty, in the spirit of persecution, and demand it with insolence, in the midst of the enjoyment of it. Such behaviour plainly shews, that, not content with being free, they want to rule ; and since they cannot plead that any harsh treatment hath provoked them to these outrages, they are so far less excusable than some of their predecessors in the times of our troubles.

But however strongly we are cautioned against licentiousness, by the sufferings of former days, there hath arisen, notwithstanding, in our own, one very shocking kind of it, almost peculiar to this nation, that of publicly treating religion with contempt ; and after magnifying morals merely in opposition to it, explaining them away to just nothing. Setting the world at large in these respects, appears to be a principal point which some have at heart ; whose character in scripture might surely have given a more general suspicion of them than it hath ; that *while they promise others liberty, they are themselves the servants of corruption* *. And too many, who have no design of contributing to the progress of irreligion, see it, however, with great tranquillity. Let men think, let men act just as they will, provided they are not bigots, but persons of free principles, the public is safe, and all is well. But is it safe that they should be bigots to atheism, bigots to profligateness ? Or can it be a matter of indifference, whether they have a good and right rule of conduct, though it were with some mistakes ; or whether they have none at all, or quite a wrong one ? We own, that false notions about religion were one great cause of the sufferings of this nation ; but so were false notions about freedom another. And why are mistakes, or even wilful abuses, a reason for trampling upon the former, when they are not thought a reason against exalting the latter without bounds ? We own, that superstition and enthusiasm ought to be guarded against ; and that this is a most important lesson of providence to us on this day. But it cannot be right to guard against them, by rooting out of mens minds the reverence due to the Author of Nature ; or by taking methods, which, in the natural course
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* 2 Pet. ii. 19.

of things, will bring one or both of them back upon us, as perhaps we have begun to experience ; or at least will bring evils not less formidable. Public happiness cannot subsist without social virtue and moral self-government ; nor can either of these subsist without regard to God. Nothing but the thought of his seeing and rewarding, can possibly have force sufficient, in all cases, to restrain men's passions, to counterbalance their present interests, to excite the indolent, keep the enterprising within due bounds, and unite all in making the common good their common end.

We shall, therefore, neglect the most important *counsels* of Providence on this day, if we learn not from so instructive a dispensation of it, that just sense of our duty to the Governor and Lawgiver of the world ; which, if our forefathers had preserved, these miseries had never happened ; and, if we preserve, they will never happen more. For as, on the one hand, religion enforces powerfully that necessary caution expressed by the prophet *Ezra* : *Seeing thou our God hast promised us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such deliverance as this, should we again break thy commandments, wouldst thou not be angry with us, till thou hast consumed us* * ; so on the other, it supports us with that noble confidence expressed by the prophet *Samuel* : *Fear not ; but serve the Lord with all your heart : for the Lord will not forsake his people, for his great name's sake. Only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth : for consider how great things he hath done for you* †.

* *Ezra* ix. 13, 14.† *I Sam.* xii. 20, 22, 24.

S E R M O N CXXXI.

(Preached before the Incorporated Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, in the Parish Church of St. Mary-le-Bow, on Friday, February 20. 1740-1.

ON CHRISTIAN BENEVOLENCE AND COMPASSION TO THE SAVAGE AND BARBAROUS NATIONS.

MARK vi. 34.

And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people; and was moved with compassion towards them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things.

THIS passage of the evangelist expresses, in so strong and engaging a manner, the benevolent temper of our blessed Lord, and his tender regard to the spiritual wants of men, that, if we suffer our minds to dwell upon it a while, it cannot fail of exciting the same disposition in us; especially if we consider, that the view which he is here described to have had of their destitute condition, not only induced him *to teach them himself many things concerning the kingdom of God**, but caused that most serious reflection and exhortation, *The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few: pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest†*: immediately after which, he sent forth *his twelve disciples* to preach the gospel‡; as he did the *seventy* at another time, on the very same motive, mentioned by another evangelist in the very same words §: thus opening

* Luke ix. 11.

† Matth. x. 1.

‡ Matth. ix. 36—38.

§ Luke x. 1, 2.

ing the way, by his previous care of *the lost sheep of the house of Israel**, for uniting us all into *one fold under one shepherd*†.

To carry on the great work which he began, of directing mankind to present and future happiness, is the end of this society: incorporated by a prince, to whom religion and liberty will have eternal obligations; and established, first for the support of Christianity in our colonies and factories abroad, then for the propagation of it amongst the Heathens intermixed with them, and bordering upon them; but taking its name from the remoter and more extensive part of the design.

Every possible reason required our predecessors, in this excellent undertaking, to begin with inspecting the state of the *English* plantations in *America*. And nothing could be more applicable to them on that occasion than the words of the text: *They saw much people, and were moved with compassion towards them; because they were as sheep not having a shepherd*. The *European* inhabitants there being private adventurers, neither numerous, nor rich, nor certain of success, nor unanimous in belief, established in several provinces no form whatever of public worship and instruction. Too many of them carried but little sense of Christianity abroad with them; a great part of the rest suffered it to wear out gradually; and their children grew of course to have yet less than they; till in some countries there were scarce any footsteps of it left beyond the mere name. No teacher was known, no religious assembly held; the Lord's day distinguished only by more general dissoluteness; the sacrament of baptism not administered for near twenty years together, nor that of the Lord's supper for near sixty, amongst many thousands of people, who did not deny the obligation of these duties, but lived notwithstanding in a stupid neglect of them. Such was the state of things in more of our colonies than one; and where it was a little better, it was, however, lamentably bad. Some persons appear very desirous of seeing what sort of creatures men would be without the knowledge of God. Here a sufficient trial was made of this: and it shewed to an unhappy degree of certainty, that they would be wicked and

* Matth. x. 6.

† John x. 16.

profligate, and brutal in every respect, and return in a few generations to entire barbarism. Possibly, indeed, they might have been delivered from this evil by that of Popery; which, always taking advantage of ignorance and profaneness, had already begun to spread; and dreadful was the alternative of one or the other. In these circumstances, the poor inhabitants made, from all parts, the most affecting representations of their deplorable condition; the truth of which was but too fully confirmed by their respective governors, and the persons of principal note in each province. There could not be worthier objects of regard than such complainants. And if they, who remained insensible, did not deserve pity so much, they wanted it still more. The society, therefore, in proportion to their own ability, and the need of each place, first sent over missionaries, to perform the offices of religion amongst them, then schoolmasters, to instruct their children in the principles of it; who, after *enduring much contradiction of sinners**, and going through a great variety of labours and difficulties, have, through the blessing of God, made a remarkable change in the face of things; and laid a noble ground-work, of what, we hope, will every day be carried on towards perfection. But at present much remains to be done. Multitudes continue, as before, in a thoughtless disregard to almost every part of Christianity, and multitudes also are daily petitioning for help; which to some we cannot give at all, and to others so little, that they have divine service only once in many weeks; and several districts of sixty, seventy and eighty miles long, have but one minister to officiate in each of them.

The next object of the society's concern were the poor negroes. These unhappy wretches learn, in their native country, the grossest idolatry, and the most savage dispositions; and then are sold to the best purchaser; sometimes by their enemies, who would else put them to death; sometimes by their nearest friends, who are either unable or unwilling to maintain them. Their condition in our colonies, though it cannot well be worse than it would have been at home, is yet nearly as hard as possible: their servitude most laborious, their punishments most severe. And thus many thousands of them

* Heb. xii. 3.

them spend their whole days, one generation after another, undergoing, with reluctant minds, continual toil in this world, and comforted with no hopes of reward in a better. For it is not to be expected, that masters, too commonly negligent of Christianity themselves, will take much pains to teach it their slaves; whom even the better part of them are in a great measure habituated to consider, as they do their cattle, merely with a view to the profit arising from them. Not a few, therefore, have openly opposed their instruction, from an imagination, now indeed proved and acknowledged to be groundless, that baptism would entitle them to freedom. Others, by obliging them to work on *Sundays* to provide themselves necessaries, leave them neither time to learn religion, nor any prospect of being able to subsist, if once the duty of resting on that day makes part of their belief. And some, it may be feared, have been averse to their becoming Christians, because, after that, no pretence will remain for not treating them like men. When these obstacles are added to the fondness they have for their old Heathenish rites, and the strong prejudices they must have against teachers from among those whom they serve so unwillingly, it cannot be wondered, if the progress made in their conversion prove but slow. After some experience of this, catechists were appointed in two places, by way of trial, for their instruction alone; whose success, where it was least, hath not been inconsiderable; and so great in the plantations belonging to the society, that out of two hundred and thirty, at least seventy are now believers in Christ. And there is lately an improvement to this scheme begun to be executed, by qualifying and employing young negroes, prudently chosen, to teach their countrymen; from which, in the opinion of the best judges, we may reasonably promise ourselves, that this miserable *people*, the generality of whom have hitherto *sat in darkness*, will see *great light**.

There still remains another branch of the society's care, the *Indians* bordering on our settlements. These consist of various nations, valuable for some of their qualities, but immersed in the vilest superstitions, and engaged in almost per-

* Matth. iv. 16.

petual wars against each other, which they prosecute with barbarities unheard of amongst the rest of mankind; implacable in their resentments, when once provoked; boundless in their intemperance, when they have opportunities for it; and at such times mischievous in the highest degree; impatient of labour, to procure themselves the common conveniences of life; inhumanly negligent of persons in years; and, if accounts of such things may be credited, not scrupling to kill and eat their nearest relations, when the long expeditions, which they make, for hunting, or against enemies, have reduced them to straits. Now, these poor creatures also, diligent endeavours have been used to enlighten and reclaim, on such occasions, and by such methods, as were least suspicious. For, without due precautions, harm would be done, instead of good, where natural jealousy is so industriously fomented by an artful neighbour. And, after all precautions, it cannot be an easy work to convert nations, whose manners are so uncultivated; whose languages are so different, so hard to learn, and so little adapted to the doctrines of religion; with whom we scarce ever contract affinities; and who seldom continue long enough in the same place, to let any good impressions fix into habits. Yet, notwithstanding these difficulties, which frustrated formerly a very expensive attempt, another hath been made of late; and, through the blessing of God, hath so reformed and improved the morals, together with the notions, of one *Indian* tribe*, that we cannot but hope the rest will be induced, by seeing their happiness, to follow their example.

You have now heard in brief the state of our colonies with respect to religion. And were the prospect of further success much smaller than it is, yet our rule would be, to do our duty, and leave the event to Heaven. Persons of unwilling or desponding minds, may easily find arguments to prove every good design unpromising, or even impracticable. But the natural dictate of piety and virtue is to try. And the express command of our blessed Lord is, that *the gospel be preached*

* The *Mohawks*, who compose two Christian congregations, each consisting of above 200 persons. Their schoolmaster is a *Mohawk*. There are also some converts amongst the *Oneidan* and *Tuscararo Indians*.

*preached to every creature**. Nor is only the offer of instruction to Heathens, but the continuance of it for ever amongst Christians, the will of him, who, as *he gave some, apostles and evangelists, gave some also pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, and the edifying of his body*†. By endeavouring to our power, that these things be done, we shall pay obedience to his authority, and imitate his example: we shall give a proof to our own hearts, that we are indeed his disciples, and convince the world, that zeal for religion is not yet extinguished; we shall habituate ourselves to the most amiable of virtues, good-will to mankind in the most important of their interests; we shall serve the purposes of providence, which have their accomplishment, *whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear*‡; and how much soever we may *labour in vain* with respect to others, *yet our judgment will be with the Lord, and our work with our God*§.

But the same God hath promised, that his truth shall finally prevail upon earth. And though we cannot say, at what time, or by what degrees, this promise shall be fulfilled; yet we have room to hope, that every sincere endeavour is all along contributing something towards its completion. The good seed, which appears to lie dead for a while, will spring up in its season: that, which seems to shoot weakly at first, will gain strength insensibly, through the favourable influences of heaven; and *the grain of mustard-seed become a tree*||. Thus have these colonies themselves grown: thus hath Christianity grown from its beginning, both in other places, and in them also: nor have we any reason to doubt its going on to do so still. In less than forty years, under many discouragements, and with an income very disproportionate to the vastness of the undertaking, a great deal hath been done; though little notice may have been taken of it, by persons inattentive to these things, or backward to acknowledge them. Near a hundred churches have been built: above ten thousand bibles and common prayers, above a hundred thousand other pious tracts distributed: great multitudes,

* Mark xvi. 15.

§ Isa. xlix. 5.

† Eph. iv. 11, 12.

|| Matth. xiii. 31, 32.

‡ Ezek. ii. 5.

tudes, upon the whole, of negroes and *Indians* brought over to the Christian faith; many numerous congregations have been set up, which now support the worship of God at their own expence, where it was not known before; and seventy persons are constantly employed, at the expence of the society, in the farther service of the gospel*. All this, we grant, makes but a small appearance, in a tract of land, extending sixteen hundred miles. But it is an encouraging specimen, however, of what longer time and more liberal assistance may effect.

Both the hopes, and the means, of supporting Christianity amongst our own people there, are just the same as here at home. And though the Negroes and *Indians* are prejudiced against it; and but poorly qualified, in comparison, to judge of the evidence of it; yet they and all men *have the work of the law written in their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness*†. They may be convicted but too easily of transgressing evident duties of nature; and when once they see their need of repentance and pardon, they will gladly receive the gospel of Christ, of which these two are the distinguishing articles. It will appear in itself infinitely preferable to what they have believed hitherto. The teachers of it will appear, both from their superior knowledge, and good lives, worthy of credit. The professors of it around them will bear a testimony to it, in some respects the stronger, for their being often condemned by it. And if such arguments do not amount, after all, to the highest evidence; they afford, however, very rational motives of assent, especially to persons capable of no further information; and were these motives weaker than they are, yet, the grace of God producing by them so powerful an effect on the minds of men, we undoubtedly approve ourselves, by proposing them, his ministers for the happiness of our fellow-creatures; and may justly be *confident, that he who hath begun a good work in them, will perform it*‡ perfectly.

But

* Since the preaching of this sermon, all these numbers have been much increased. The missionaries, catechists and schoolmasters are now, 1765, above 100.

† Rom. ii. 15.

‡ Phil. i. 6.

But perhaps not our success, but the use and benefit of it, will be called in question. Now of this we apprehend, there is abundant proof. The bare profession and outward appearance of such a religion, as the Christian is, if taught in any tolerable purity, must have some right influence; and the body of a people cannot go the utmost lengths in wickedness, whilst that appearance subsists. What lengths they would go in time, if it were lost, as we have not experienced, we are not apt to consider. But a little reflexion on the number and strength of human passions, and the abilities, which we have, of finding means to gratify them, would give us a high value of whatever hath any peculiar force to restrain them. The one institution of a day of holy rest, is not only, under prudent regulations, a great refreshment to the bulk of mankind; but greatly tends to civilize them also, by uniting neighbourhoods in formed assemblies, to acknowledge their common dependence on God, and relation to each other, with hearts disengaged from selfish attentions, and open to friendly regards. Nor is it possible, be they ever so negligent hearers of public worship and instruction, but considerable impressions, at least general ones, must remain upon their minds. And most evidently the impressions of religion dispose men to every thing productive of common good: to justice and veracity, and the reverence of an oath; without which the intercourse of man with man is not a moment safe: to faithfulness, duty, and love in the several relations of life, public and private: to mildness, charity, and compassion in their whole behaviour: to sobriety and industry, the pillars of national wealth and greatness; and to that joyful hope of a better world, which is our truest direction, and firmest support, in every stage of our journey through this. Many more persons will be thus influenced in various degrees, than are usually observed: for a regular inoffensive behaviour affords little matter of speculation and discourse. And though still the generality may be bad; yet, if left to themselves, they would certainly have been worse. Every body owns, that a wrong belief hath a great power to deprave mens morals. Surely then a right one must have some power to reform them. And if not so much as might be wished, this is no more an argument against the usefulness of religion, than of reason;

reason; but a strong argument, why both should be cultivated to the utmost; and carefully applied to so important a purpose. If our colonies had not experienced great evils from the decay of Christianity amongst them; they would never have petitioned us so earnestly for instruction in it, as they have done. And if they had not experienced great good from the restoration of it, that earnestness would never have continued, as it doth, to this day.

Nor will our compliance with their request be a benefit only to them, but to this nation also. If they are dishonest and profligate, every single person here, who hath concerns with them, will be in danger of suffering by it. If they consume their wealth and their time in vices and follies, their trade will be gained over, from them and us, by our rivals and adversaries. And if the ties of a religion, binding men so strongly to *be subject for conscience sake* *, are loosened from off their minds, which may some time or another need every tie, that can keep them attached to us; it will much facilitate their becoming adversaries themselves. And we shall well deserve their revolting from us, if we take no care of their obeying God. But, on the contrary, as Christian principles will teach them dutifulness and loyalty; so receiving from hence the support of those principles, will recommend us to their gratitude; hoping for the continuance of that support, will create some dependence in point of interest; and agreeing in the same faith and worship with us, will be an everlasting motive to civil unity also.

But another common benefit of propagating Christianity in our colonies is, that thus we shall hinder corruptions of Christianity from prevailing there, and sharing with profaneness a divided empire over the land. If no authorized teachers are sent, some inducement or another will raise voluntary ones from time to time; and very possibly the less reasonable their doctrine is, the more gladly it may be received. For if sentiments of religion are not duly cultivated, as they quite wear out of some minds, so in others they degenerate into superstition or enthusiasm. And accordingly many pernicious errors, besides the abovementioned capital one of Popery, took
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* Rom. xiii. 5.

early root in these provinces; nor are they yet extirpated, perhaps in part newly revived; some dissolving the obligations of moral duties; some destroying the inward peace of very pious and good persons, and making life gloomy and uncomfortable; some leading men to ascribe every folly or wickedness, that possesses the fancy, to divine inspiration; some inconsistent with our present happy establishment; and others, destructive of the safety of all governments whatever, by forbidding to contribute any kind of assistance to the public defence against enemies; on which notion the representatives of the province of *Pennsylvania* have acted this last summer*. Now let it only be considered, how fatal a more general belief of some of these doctrines must have been there at present; indeed how very unhappy the belief of any of them must be at all times; and

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* See a printed collection of messages, answers, addresses, &c. the substance of which is as follows. The Quakers, *having applied themselves with great industry to obtain an uncommon majority in the assembly, though they are not above one third of the people in number, refused to make any provision of necessaries for the troops to be raised in that province, as being a thing repugnant to their religious principles, though his majesty had notified under his sign manual, that he expected it from them.* Soon after this they adjourned for above five weeks, *though the governor made strong instances to the contrary, setting forth, That as the new levies were in want of every thing, even houses to cover their heads, he was hourly apprehensive of their committing some disorders.* And being called together again by him in about a fortnight, instead of raising any money, they made a complaint, that many of their servants had been enlisted, and demanded the restitution of them. The governor answered, that they might easily have prevented this inconvenience, and might still easily remedy it, by methods which he pointed out to them; that he had done what he could to relieve them, and would continue to do so; but that forcing out of his majesty's troops at once all the servants in them, would be unreasonable and unjust, very detrimental to the service, and very dangerous to the public peace. Yet notwithstanding these representations, and though Mr. Penn, one of their proprietors, many merchants and other inhabitants of *Philadelphia*, and the council of the province, concurred with the governor, and pressed them earnestly to answer his majesty's expectations, they came at length to this resolution only: *That 3000 l. of their current money be paid for the king's use; provided that all the servants enlisted in the province, whom they had computed at 300, and valued at 10 l. each, be first returned to their respective masters, free of all charges; and such assurances given as three persons, named in the resolution, should think fitting that the said servants are returned, and that no servants be enlisted for the future.* These being the conditions on which the money was given, it will not be thought strange, that when the last advices came from thence, no part of it had been paid,

the importance of supporting instructors in true religion, were it only for a standing guard against the worldly inconveniences of false religion, will evidently appear to be very great.

But let us now think, what good must follow from extending this instruction to the poor Negroes also. The servitude and hard labour which they undergo, be it as justifiable as it can, surely requires, that we should make them all the amends in our power; and the danger, into which they have brought our colonies more than once, demands the greatest care to compose and soften their vindictive and sullen spirits. Now there can be nothing contrived on purpose, more likely to effect this, than belief of the gospel; which not only forbids in general, both doing and *recompensing evil**; but commands in particular *as many as are servants under the yoke, to count their masters worthy of all honour*†, *and be subject to them with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward; for this is thank worthy, if a man for conscience towards God endure grief, suffering wrongfully*‡: *to do service with good will, as to the Lord, and not to men; knowing, that whatever good any man doth, the same he shall receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free*§. The tendency of such doctrine must be, to make their tempers milder, and their lives happier. And no imagination can be suggested to them, of any worldly exemptions or privileges arising from their profession of it. For as human authority hath granted them none; so the scripture, far from making any alteration in civil rights, expressly directs, that *ever man abide in the condition wherein he is called*, with great indifference of mind concerning outward circumstances||; and the only rule, which it prescribes for servants of the same religion with their masters, is, *not to despise them because they are brethren, but do them service the rather*¶. Nor hath experience at all shewn the behaviour of such, in the present case, to be different from what reason would lead us to expect. On the contrary, in a great rebellion of the Negroes at *New York*, only two of those who had received any instruction, and only one who had been baptized, was so much as suspected of being guilty; and

* Rom. xii. 17.

§ Eph. vi. 7, 8.

† 1 Tim. vi. 1.

|| 1 Cor. vii. 20—24.

‡ 1 Pet. ii. 18, 19.

¶ 1 Tim. vi. 2.

and he was afterwards acknowledged to be innocent; but the deepest in the conspiracy were the slaves of those persons, who had opposed the most warmly all endeavours for their conversion. We may therefore depend on it, that success in these endeavours will both be a security, and every way an advantage, to their proprietors. And if it doth procure the poor wretches themselves a little more kind usage, they will then be fitter to receive it; and at present, as much as can be safely allowed them is but their due. The apostle's injunction was made not only for slaves, but for Heathen slaves: *Masters, give to your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven**; *neither is there respect of persons with him†*. And if their becoming Christians will help, as it certainly will, to obtain them such treatment; putting together their condition and their numbers, there are but few things, which, even on that account, common humanity more obliges us to attempt.

Then as to the influence of Christianity on the *Indians*, it must undoubtedly restrain their mutual barbarities, which it doth not appear what else will, and dispose them to a settled and orderly life. By means of this, they will come to enjoy the benefit of agriculture, and of all the arts that are useful in society: they will of consequence grow happier and more numerous; and as they will become at the same time more harmless too, it would be both an immoral and a false policy, to envy them these advantages. They have yielded up to us a considerable part of their country; and it is but common gratitude, to shew them the way of living comfortably in the rest. We have introduced amongst them both diseases and vices, which have destroyed great numbers of them; surely it is fit, that we should communicate something to them, which will do them good. It may be feared they are hitherto the worse for their knowledge of us; but they will certainly be the better for the knowledge of our religion. And the more they are prejudiced against it by the wickedness of its professors, the more need there is to lay before them in a full light the excellency of its precepts; and to convince them, that there are persons, who not only believe, but practise

* Col. vi. 1.

† Ephes. vi. 9.

them. Nor should it be forgotten, that every single *Indian*, whom we make a Christian, we make a friend and ally at the same time ; both against the remaining Heathen, and a much more dangerous neighbour, from whose instigations almost all that we have suffered by them is allowed to have come.

But the temporal advantages of propagating Christianity are infinitely the least. If we allow but the truth of natural religion, we must admit the future, as well as present, happiness of mankind to depend on preserving and diffusing the knowledge of that religion. And there is neither instance nor prospect of either of these things being attempted by any other method, than that of preaching the gospel ; of which the doctrines and duties of nature make so large a part. If therefore it be of importance, that the people in our colonies should worship the Maker of heaven and earth, and believe virtue to be his law ; that the *Negroes* and *Indians* should be *turned from idols, to serve the living and true God* * ; and that all should know, there will be a recompence hereafter to the just and to the unjust ; whoever deserves the name of Deist in a good sense, as it stands opposed to Atheist, whoever is indeed an enemy to superstition, and a friend to mankind, will rejoice to have that faith carefully taught them, by which alone they will learn these momentous truths ; to have it *told among the Heathen, that the Lord is King, and that he shall judge the people righteously* †.

But if *the gospel of Christ*, besides comprehending the system of natural religion, be, by virtue of its own peculiar doctrines, *the power of God unto salvation* ‡ : then every possible motive concurs, for being zealous in spreading it throughout the earth. Revelation indeed neither obliges nor permits us to pass a hard sentence on those, who have never had it proposed with sufficient evidence. *To their own master they stand or fall* § : and of them only, *to whom much is given, shall much be required* ||. *For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not* ¶. But still, *as all men have sinned, and come short of*
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* 1 Theff. i. 9.

§ Rom. xiv. 4.

† Psal. xcvi. 10.

|| Luke xii. 48.

‡ Rom. i. 16.

¶ 2 Cor. viii. 12.

the glory of God *, and there is but one *name under heaven whereby they can be saved* †; as Christianity is inexpressibly more efficacious for the reformation of mankind than unassisted reason; as our only assurance, either of receiving a future reward, or escaping future punishment, must arise from scripture; and we have no intimation in it of any person's enjoying that *life and immortality, which Jesus Christ hath brought to light* ‡, but such as believe in him; these considerations, without limiting at all the free mercies of God, cannot but shew us the great superiority of our own condition, and make us ask, with great solicitude, concerning others: *How then shall they believe in him, of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear, without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent* §? Our blessed Lord hath entrusted his followers, to preserve his gospel in purity, where it is, and communicate it, where it is not. By their faithful discharge of these duties formerly, we ourselves were *delivered from the bondage of Heathenism into the glorious liberty of the children of God* ||. It now belongs to us, in our turn, to *strengthen our brethren* ¶, and *call them that are afar off* **: and where shall we find more proper objects of our care and zeal?

Perhaps it may be said, they ought to maintain their own teachers. But this cannot be expected from the Heathen, who are insensible of their want of them; nor from those of our own people, who are too like Heathen, and have not the sense of it which they ought. Such as have, do maintain their teachers, where they are able. For there are very indigent parts, as well as very opulent. Some whole provinces have no assistance at all from us. And in most, if not all places, we are only joint contributors. As soon as ever there is room for it, they will be left to build by themselves on the foundation laid, and the society will go on to new work. Inquiries are constantly made what each congregation can do; and missionaries have been withdrawn till they will do it. For we are not only desirous, but under a necessity, of being

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* Rom. iii. 23.

† Acts iv. 12.

‡ 2 Tim. i. 10.

§ Rom. x. 14, 15.

|| Rom. viii. 21.

¶ Luke xxii. 32.

** Acts ii. 39.

as frugal as possible, by the daily increase of petitions for help.

But some will object farther, that all the assistance we can give Christianity, is too much wanted in our own country, to admit of any schemes for propagating it in foreign ones. And would to God these persons would ask themselves, whether they indeed wish to remove the objection which they make, or only argue against this and that way of encouraging religion, to save the expence of doing it in any way. A true and judicious friend will carefully avoid raising an opposition between two charities; which is a much surer method of hurting the one, than serving the other: whereas, with this precaution, a first scarce ever suffers considerably, if at all, by setting up a second; but mens hearts are enlarged to contribute to both. Every single member of the *Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge* at home, was originally incorporated into ours for spreading it abroad. That society is at this day promoting the same knowledge in the east as well as here, whilst we are doing it in the west. Many of us belong to both; and promise ourselves a larger share of the blessing of God in each for neglecting neither. In these nations great provision is made already; and greater, we hope, will daily be made, for offering salvation to mankind. They who will reject it after all, must do so, and take the consequences. But let us, *in nothing terrified by our adversaries, strive together for the faith of the gospel**: and not only sustain a defensive war, but shew, that attacking the dominions of our Lord and Master shall increase our zeal to extend them. Our colonies receive from hence a great deal of what is bad. We send them our malefactors; we send them our immoral and irreligious customs; we send them our infidel and profligate books. Surely we ought to do some good, where we do so much harm. And consider, to whom is it done? To our countrymen and fellow-subjects; distant indeed from us in situation, but closely connected by the strongest ties. To them, to their servants and neighbours, it is that we are imparting happiness; and possibly securing it to ourselves, or our posterity, there, if God would permit us at home to suffer what we deserve.

Now,

* Phil. i. 27, 28.

Now, this unquestionably right design cannot be carried on, but under the direction of a regular society. For without it, small benefactions could not be applied at all; and large ones must be applied separately, to great disadvantage; no uniform influence could be preserved, nor settled information had, nor any of that experience gained, which results from long and extensive acquaintance with the state of things. What sort of persons they are who compose this society, will appear from the printed list. None of them receive any temporal advantage from being members of it. They are all obliged to subscribe a yearly contribution to the good work which they undertake. A considerable number of the chief of them constantly attend upon it. And they will admit with pleasure every serious Christian who offers himself, and is qualified to assist in it. Their standing rules are publicly known, allowed to be good, and faithfully observed. They give the world a yearly account of their success, with an abstract of their receipts and disbursements. They deliver yearly the particulars of them to the Lord Chancellor and two chief justices. And they have proceeded from the beginning to this day with great unanimity in all their affairs.

It hath been pretended, indeed, that immoral and negligent men are employed as missionaries. And to say that this hath never once happened, would be going too far: but that it hath frequently happened, or ever for want of due care, is utterly false. Strict examination is made at first into the characters of all that are offered; strict inquiry into their behaviour afterwards; and exact accounts required from them twice a year, of what duty they do, and what progress they make. The most earnest requests, the most solemn adjurations are sent, that all, who can, would give any useful intelligence relating to them: and great regard is always paid to such intelligence; yet very few complaints are brought in, either from good will or bad. Too many, it must be owned, of desperate fortunes and characters, who are or pretend to be in holy orders, transport themselves into *America*, and behave there as it may be expected they will. But we have no concern with any, whose names are not seen in the public list of persons receiving salaries from us. And the larger the number is of vicious clergymen, who go thither of their own
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accord, the more is the need of sending as many worthy ones as possible, to correct their influence.

Were there room, indeed, for making larger allowances, more persons of great abilities might be had. Were there better opportunities for a learned education abroad, more of the natives of our colonies would be fitted for the work; which they would undertake with many advantages above such as go from hence. And had they bishops there, these persons might be ordained without the inconveniencies of a long voyage: vacancies might be supplied in much less time; the primitive and most useful appointment of confirmation might be restored; and an orderly discipline exercised in the churches. Nor would such an establishment encroach at all, either on liberty of conscience, which ought ever to be sacredly preserved, or on the present civil rights, either of the governors or people in our colonies. Nor would it bring their dependence on *Great-Britain* into any degree of that danger, which some persons profess to apprehend so strongly on this occasion, who would make no manner of scruple about doing other things much more likely to destroy it; who are not terrified in the least, that such numbers there reject the episcopal order entirely; nor perhaps would be greatly alarmed, were ever so many to reject religion itself; though evidently, in proportion as either is thrown off, all dependence produced by it ceases of course. To this equally pious and harmless design, two great prelates*, now deceased, gave a thousand pounds each; and a lady, incomparably more eminent for her virtues than her quality†, bequeathed the sum of five hundred pounds last year to the same purpose; which God incline the hearts of all, in whose power it is, to promote as it deserves! But in the mean time, let it not be imagined, that the difficulties under which we labour, are too heavy to be overcome. Difficulties are arguments for nothing, but more diligence, and more liberality. For if we stop till we have every thing that might be wished, when shall we go on?

Another

* Arch. Tenison, and Sir J. Trelawney, Bp. of Winchester.

† Lady Elizabeth Hastings.

Another objection to the conduct of the society is, that they have sent missionaries to some places; in which there were already Christian assemblies established and supported. But in one sort of these assemblies, there is no Christian ministry; no celebration of the sacraments of the gospel: In another, infants are denied the sacrament of baptism. And in the least exceptionable, there are several things, in which the consciences of many, we apprehend with great reason, cannot acquiesce; who were not, therefore, to be left destitute of public worship; especially as our charter was granted, in express terms, for *the maintenance of an orthodox clergy in those parts*. And the members of this church, I am sorry to say it, lying under peculiar burdens in one considerable province*, which other professors of Christianity do not, though equally dissenters from the majority there, they seem of right entitled to some peculiar assistance in return. We have obtruded the service of the church of *England* nowhere; we have settled no clergyman anywhere, without the inhabitants requesting it, and contributing to it; we have sent no successor upon a vacancy, without their renewing that request. But if the provision, which we have made for the people of our own communion, hath proved instrumental, at the same time, to bring others over into it, we hope there is very far from being any harm done. Indeed unity of profession amongst ourselves, effected by methods of peace and charity, will greatly recommend our religion to the infidels; who else may be tempted to continue as they are, for want of knowing with whom to join.

We acknowledge it, whoever is taught Christianity by our care, will be taught it as professed in the church established here by law. There can be no teaching at all, but in some

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particular

* In *New England*, they are rated to the support of what the *Independents*, who are the greater part of that people, call, though without right, the Established Church. And the goods of many have been seized, or their bodies imprisoned, for nonpayment. The *Anabaptists*, on their petition, were exempted from paying this rate; and the *Quakers*, without petitioning; but the petition of the members of our church was rejected.

N. B. This grievance hath been redressed, under the administration of Governor *Shirley*, in the province of *Massachusetts Bay*; and, I believe, since the year 1752, in the colony of *Connecticut* also.

particular form. We think our own the best. Every Body thinks it far from the worst. At least our converts will have the Bible put into their hands, to judge for themselves. And which is righter, that Heathens and persons of no religion should continue what they are, or become what we would make them? Our society is by much the most considerable one for this purpose. And were it now to be erected, instead of having subsisted so long, not a single step could be taken on any other footing than this; that the smaller part of those, who wished well to it, must be concluded by the greater.

So good a design, therefore, being so properly executed, the expences, which must attend it, ought to be supplied. *The Lord hath ordained, that they who preach the gospel, should live of the gospel* *. And there is the same reason, the same necessity indeed, that the missionaries in *America* should have due provision made for them, as that the apostles should at first, or the ministers of our parishes now. And if persons of character, being at liberty, as they are, to exercise their function elsewhere, are willing to undertake such an employment as this, at such a distance, on so small an allowance as they receive from the society, they ought surely to have it raised for them very cheerfully; and *be counted worthy of double honour* †, in the sense of recompence as well as esteem, if it could be paid them.

But perhaps it will be said, supporting designs of this nature is the clergy's business: let them take care of it. And so, God be thanked, we do; and so, I hope in God, we shall, whither we are helped in it more or less; in such manner, as both to keep pace with the willing, and make amends for the unwilling. We desire not to boast, and we need not to be ashamed, of the proportion which we contribute. But we may, notwithstanding, do very well to increase it. For there is so much expected of us, and we are so greatly concerned to answer every reasonable expectation to the utmost, that if any of our order have omitted taking sufficient notice of a charity so immediately related to their profession, it is their duty, on many accounts, to make full compensation to it without delay. It is indeed our duty, on every occasion, at all times,

* 1 Cor. ix. 14.

† 1 Tim. v. 17.

times, but especially in an age when no part of our conduct will be interpreted favourably, to avoid all appearance, either of preferring *riches in this world* before being *rich in good works**, or of *loving pleasures more than God*†. St. Paul took wages of some churches to do others service‡. Let us, out of the wages which we take, do all the service we can to the church of God; and *distribute largely to the necessities of the saints*§, particularly their spiritual ones.

But is the support of this design incumbent on the clergy alone? Did not the laity originally maintain the apostles in their travels? And ought they not still to be equally zealous, *that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified*||? Do they not know, how very inconsiderable the benefices of far the greatest part of the clergy are; what hospitality is required of the rest of us; and how large demands are continually made upon us for charities of various kinds; to the poor of our parishes and neighbourhoods, of our brethren, their widows and orphans; to every pious and compassionate use, public or private? And are they not sensible also, that were we ever so deficient, this excuses not them: that every man's duty is, not to guard against doing more good than comes to his share, but to do willingly what he can; and that each one's reward shall be in proportion to his work?

Whoever, therefore, finds himself disposed to make objections, let him examine what is at the bottom of them; whether it be not really disregard to religion, or want of humanity; some groundless prejudice, or some wrong attachment to self-interest or self-gratification. If so, let him first plant the gospel in his own heart, and all his pleas against contributing to the propagation of it will soon vanish.

Every man's charities, indeed, ought to be left to his own choice. But so many, even of those who are bountiful in other ways, neglect pious uses almost entirely, that good persons have both opportunity and reason for allotting to these a large proportion of their beneficence. And amongst these, as that now under consideration is of too extensive a nature

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* 1 Tim. vi. 17, 18.

† 2 Tim. iii. 4.

‡ 2 Cor. xi. 8.

§ Rom. xii. 13.

|| 2 Thess. iii. 1.

to be thoroughly comprehended by every one, and at too great a distance to make any strong impression on the generality of the world, they who do form just conceptions of it, should, in proportion to the smallness of their number, be the more liberal to it, as in truth there is need. The only certain income we have is a trifle, not sixty pounds a year*. The voluntary subscriptions, though they are ten times greater, are not a fifth part of the annual expence. Hitherto, therefore, almost all hath depended on occasional gifts; which, after sinking much lower than they were formely, for some few years increased again. On this encouragement, the society, importuned continually for new missionaries, with an earnestness which nothing but necessity could justify resisting, made a great addition to their number. And had the contributions of this last year risen much above the preceding ones, it had been but too easy to have disposed of them all. But on the contrary, though one noble benefaction of a thousand pounds hath been given†, to be employed for the conversion of the negroes, yet those to the other parts of our design have fallen very short; and a heavy debt hath been of consequence incurred. This may possibly reduce us to ask assistance, in a method, of which, though authorised, we have seldom made use; being desirous, that *he who sheweth mercy*, might appear to do it *with cheerfulness*‡, and not constrained by solicitations. But in whatever manner application is made to persons, we trust the same God, who hath provided for us wonderfully thus long, will now also dispose their hearts to consider, that on them it depends, whether such a design, so far advanced, through so many difficulties, shall be carried on still, and gain ground continually, as it easily may; or whether it shall fall back, and sink into nothing, with very little hope of being ever revived; that he will move wise men to think what the public interest requires of them, and benevolent persons to regard the private happiness of their fellow-creatures; true Christians, to support and enlarge the kingdom of their Master with zeal; true Protestants, to silence effectually the boasts and reproaches of the *Romanists* on this head;

* Now, in 1765, not seventy.

‡ Rom. xii. 8.

† By Mr. Batt of Hampshire.

head ; and all true friends of our religious establishment, to endeavour that it may gain as honourable a pre-eminence as possible, over the rest of the reformed churches, in so good a work.

Persons in plentiful circumstances, and perhaps at a loss for ways in which they may give alms, will here find one undoubtedly proper way. And persons in arrear to religion and charity, have an excellent opportunity offered them, of paying the debt. They who plead the multitude of other expences, might, a very great part of them, by withdrawing but a little of what they ought from their luxury and vanity, qualify themselves for liberalities, which will turn hereafter to a much better account. And such as make the increase of taxes their excuse, ought to consider, that as Providence hath brought that increase upon us, by permitting us to suffer so much from our enemies, in that part of the world, where we have done so little for God ; espousing his cause is the likeliest method of deriving a blessing on our own ; and if we neglect it, whatever may befall us there, we must impute to ourselves. We enjoy very great advantages from thence ; the government, large revenues ; the nation in general, a most beneficial trade ; every one of us, something or another, useful or agreeable in life. It is therefore our common concern, both to do good where we have received it ; and to do it in such manner, as may best secure our continuing to receive it. But they more especially, who are now raising fortunes by commerce with our *American* settlements, or who possess acquired or hereditary estates, of which that commerce laid the foundation, they should think often, how much hath accrued to them from the produce of these colonies, the country of these *Indians*, the labour of these negroes ; and reflect very seriously, what returns possibly justice, at least gratitude, and in many cases prudence also, as well as piety, direct them to make.

Some perhaps may approve one part of this undertaking beyond the rest ; and whatever they give, will be applied, if they desire it, to that alone. Some may be unwilling to let their benefactions appear : and such may with ease transmit them privately : the donation will be acknowledged, the donor unknown. But though charity given in secret, from a principle of humility, be laudable in the highest degree ; yet
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when the motive is fear of ridicule or censure from a profane age, this argues a weakness of mind, very dangerous to those who are influenced by it, and very prejudicial to religion; which cannot have a more seasonable service done it, than if persons of rank and influence, all persons indeed, who inwardly wish well to it, would openly patronize the several designs formed to promote it.

The design now before us, both deserves and requires a general co-operation, to produce its complete effect: that they who are able, should contribute to it, in proportion to their ability; and they who are not, speak well of it, and pray for it: that we of the society should be vigilant and active, prudent and impartial in our administration: that persons in authority abroad should countenance and protect the work; for in their power it is, to forward or obstruct it very greatly; that the people in general there, should not only be willing to let all under them and around them *partake of the grace of life**, but earnestly invite them to it, *with meekness of wisdom*, and by the most prevalent of arguments, *a good conversation*†. But beyond the rest it is necessary for every one concerned in the immediate execution of the design, always to remember, that bad as it is in other teachers of the gospel to behave in a manner unworthy of their profession, it will be yet worse in them, if they take an uncommon character upon themselves, only to dishonour it; and *compass sea and land*‡, with no other effect, than to make *God's name be blasphemed amongst the Gentiles*§: that they ought, with peculiar diligence, to *follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace*||; *holding fast the faithful word, as they have been taught, that they may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convince the gainsayers*¶; that they ought to be *instant, in season, out of season; to watch, endure afflictions, and make full proof of their ministry****, shewing themselves in all things patterns of good works*††.

These then are our several duties; and great will be our reward for performing them. Let us therefore, each in his station, *arise and be doing; and the Lord be with us*‡‡.

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* 1 Pet. iii. 7.

§ Rom. ii. 24.

** 2 Tim. iv. 2, 5.

† James iii. 13.

|| 2 Tim. ii. 22.

†† Tit. ii. 7.

‡ Matth. xxiii. 15.

¶ Tit. i. 9.

‡‡ 1 Chron. xxii. 16.

S E R M O N CXXXII.

(Preached in the Parish Church of *Christ-Church, London*, on *Thursday, May 6. 1743.* being the time of the yearly meeting of the children educated in the charity-schools, in and about the cities of *London* and *Westminster*.)

THE GREAT USEFULNESS OF SCHOOLS FOR THE POOR, WHEN
REGULATED BY WISDOM AND PRUDENCE.

ROMANS xiv. 16.

Let not then your good be evil spoken of.

AMONGST many excellencies, which unite to recommend our holy religion, there are few that shew its benevolent spirit in a stronger light, than its requiring us, not only to abstain from every thing sinful ourselves, but carefully to avoid giving any occasion of sin to others *. If the most innocent action that we do, will be thought a wrong one by any of our brethren, we are strictly bound, either to omit it†, if we can without considerable inconvenience, or at least to guard and explain it, as well as the nature of the case will permit: that so we may neither tempt him to censure us uncharitably, nor to imitate us against his conscience. The former of these is the danger, which the words of the text most naturally express; and to keep clear of it, is a matter of great importance.

Attention to obviate censures may often prevent us from acting, as well as others from judging, amiss. And where we act ever so rightly, yet if we are suspected of erring, though

* Rom. xiv.

† 1 Cor. viii.

though in circumstances only, and seem negligent of that suspicion, it may grieve good persons, and perhaps weaken their union with us ; it may entirely separate from us the inconsiderate and wavering ; it may give a handle to the bad for great triumph and misrepresentation ; and both incline them to grow still worse, and enable them to do still more harm. Whereas prudent care, first not to deserve reproach, and then not to lie under it, may procure us regard from mankind, by shewing regard to them ; may secure the well disposed on our side, and furnish them with the means of defending us ; may convince even the prejudiced of some of their mistakes, and moderate their vehemence in the rest. At least, we shall thus exercise a true Christian temper, improve ourselves, and be exemplary to others.

But though we are concerned to vindicate all our actions from injurious charges, yet our virtuous actions especially. When things merely lawful are condemned, the damage may be small ; but if worthy deeds are vilified, religion suffers deeply. And therefore, as we are now assembled to patronize a design, which we apprehend to be a very valuable one, but which some have opposed and decried, the erecting of schools for the children of the poor, I shall endeavour to shew,

I. That it is a *good* work.

II. What are the right methods to prevent its *being evil spoken of*.

III. What course we are to take, if that cannot be prevented entirely.

Little remains to be said indeed upon any of these points, which hath not been said often already. But if persons will repeat objections, the answers must be repeated too. And the plainest truths, as they cannot influence at all, if they are forgotten, ought to influence us the more, not the less, for being frequently inculcated.

I. *First* then it must be shewn, that this method of giving the children of the poor a Christian education is a *good* work.

Now if we believe Christianity true, we must believe it is the way to eternal happiness. And were we to doubt of its truth, we must notwithstanding see it is the way to present happiness. For it confessedly teaches, in the clearest manner,

and inforces by the strongest motives, every thing conducive to private and public welfare, and nothing else doth so. Natural religion, as distinct from Christianity, whatever zeal may be pretended for it, neither hath been, nor is likely to be, seriously propagated: nor is it capable of carrying in it the direction, the encouragement, or the terror, that revelation doth. Virtue, without religion, will perpetually be modelled by peoples fancies, and overturned by their passions and interests; for want of the hopes and fears of futurity to counterbalance them. And human laws, the only restraint besides, extend but to a small part of our behaviour; and without principle, they will be faultily contrived, and remissly or partially executed; men will elude them in some cases, break through them at all adventures in others; and, having once learnt to despise death, as they well may if nothing follows it, will have little fear of what the magistrate can inflict. All ages and nations have found these things true; they are visibly so in our own, to an uncommon degree; and experience joins with reason to acknowledge, that scripture points out the only remedy: *All thy children shall be taught of God, and great shall be the peace of thy children* *.

If then the belief of Christianity be thus necessary, instruction in it ought to be early. The absolute ignorance, in which we are born, and the propensity we manifest immediately, to receive impressions from what we see and hear, are an evident proof of our Maker's design, that we should be formed by education into what we are to be. And had this never been neglected; error and wickedness had never prevailed. Now indeed, since they have, instruction will, in most places, more or less, lead children into what is wrong. But still it is the surest method we can take, to preserve them from it. Were their friends to teach them nothing, would their own passions, and the companions they would choose, be better tutors? Their reason indeed possibly might; and very possibly might not. At least it would come too late, and be minded too little, to be trusted alone. Where young persons are taught from the first ever so well, and governed ever so prudently, it doth not always succeed. But such care must af-

ford vastly greater hope, than if they are left to themselves without any, till bad notions and customs have taken root, till their appetites are grown vehement, and their tempers stubborn, till they laugh at advice, and disdain authority. If then we would prevent all the misery such wretches may suffer, all the mischief they may do, all the burthens they may bring on society; if we would make them useful to the world, and happy in themselves; the plain rule is, *train them up when children in the way they should go, and probably when they are old, they will not depart from it* *.

But by whom shall this be done in the case of the poor? Unquestionably it is the duty of their parents; but many of them are orphans. Many have parents, who teach, or allow them to be taught, all manner of evil; and most of them have such as want leisure, or capacity, or diligence, to teach them the good, which they ought; and at the same time are unable or unwilling to pay others for teaching them. Great numbers of them indeed are removed early into families of better rank. But how very little prospect there is in general, that more care will be taken of them there, than their nearest relations took at home, I need not say. Will then the public instruction of the church suffice? But alas! what multitudes of them are there, who seldom or never go thither? The laws that require it are not executed; their parents have not used them to it; their masters are indifferent about it, or perhaps make it difficult to them; and what wonder, if, in these circumstances, the poor creatures neglect it? Besides, there is some degree of previous knowledge requisite to their attending public worship to good effect. And the minister, were they always duly sent to him, cannot alone ground them sufficiently in the first elements of that knowledge; nor in larger parishes make any considerable advance towards it.

What further provision might be made in this important affair, either by enacting new laws, or enforcing the old ones, is not a point to be considered here; but only, what can be attempted by private zeal and prudence; the laws and the execution of them continuing such as they are, and probably will be.

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* Prov. xii. 6.

Now as to persons in higher circumstances, they must and will be left to themselves, to educate their youth just as they please; and they, and we, must take the consequences. But the poor are many of them desirous to have theirs educated rightly. And most of them may be induced to it by those additional encouragements, of clothing and fitting them for business, which are singly very excellent charities, and, joined with religious instruction, make a very complete one. Surely there can be no doubt then, whether a method so beneficial every way, to the children, the parents, the public, should be joyfully embraced. The wisest and best of ancient legislators and philosophers have all prescribed a strict education of youth, as the foundation of every thing good. Both the Jewish and Christian institutions absolutely enjoin it. In Protestant countries abroad, teachers are universally provided for the children of the poor; who are in most places bound by law to become their scholars*. Our governors at home, both in church and state, with the whole body of serious persons of all denominations, have shewn their approbation of this design. The only person, who hath attempted publicly to prove it hurtful, hath attempted, in the same book, to prove *vice a public benefit*†. I know but one author more of the least note, who hath declared against these schools; and he fairly acknowledges, that, “under a proper regulation, something “like them may be commendable‡,” though he was led, by unhappy prejudices and false reports, to inveigh with great bitterness against the conduct of them.

II. Let us therefore inquire, in the *second* place, what are true methods to prevent this *good* work from being *evil* spoken of.

Now these in general must be, giving no occasion for just objections; and returning sufficient answers to unjust ones. Undoubtedly the former is the main thing. For wrong conduct neither can nor ought to be defended; and right conduct will in a great measure defend itself; yet not so entirely, but that a seasonable vindication may be necessary for the best cause. I shall therefore endeavour to set forth jointly, what

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* See the Dean of *Peterborough's* sermons, at the meeting of these children, 1740, p. 23.

† *Fable of the Bees.*

‡ *Cato's Letters*, No. 133.

ought to be done ; and, where any accusation worth notice hath been brought, what is done, so far as I have been able to learn, in the choice, the management, and the disposal of these children.

1. The liberty of *choosing* fit objects for this charity is a great advantage, which hospitals for foundlings have not ; and should be used with great uprightness and discretion. If we admit those, whose parents or other near friends are able and likely to give them a proper education, we divert the bounty, which we undertake to direct, from such as need it ; and there is but too much ground to apprehend, that some who have no need may request our assistance. If we send in children to be maintained at a common charge, whom we should else have brought up at our own ; this is burthening the school to ease ourselves, and possibly receiving more from it, than we contribute to it. And if we allow the recommendations of powerful friends, or the entreaties of dependants, to engage us in undue preference ; it is purchasing favour from the one, or the false reputation of good-nature from the other, at the expence of our character as faithful stewards.

The next consideration, after the necessities of the children, should be their fitness ; both of mind, to take in the instruction, which they are to have ; and of body, to go through the business, for which they are designed ; otherwise the pains and money, spent upon them, may be quite thrown away.

Where these things are equal, or nearly so, the offspring of industrious and good persons, ordinarily speaking, should be sure of admission before others ; both as the prospect of success with them is much fairer, and as their parents may justly expect the comfort of having this distinction shewn them by the professed patrons of religion and virtue ; which will also partake of the encouragement and countenance that they receive. Yet if the fund, intrusted with us, can be extended further, to the families of negligent, or even grossly wicked creatures ; as they certainly want instruction more, so we ought not to despair of their improving by it. If they can be kept, for any considerable time, separate from their wretched friends ; though the cost will be greater, yet the advantage is



so visible, both in speculation and in fact *, that very much good might be expected from this method, were it more practised. But even if they cannot be separated, yet what they learn at school will be some antidote against what they see at home; besides that bad parent will often assist the endeavours that are used to keep their children from becoming like them, and now and then have been shamed and reformed by them, instead of corrupting them. This kind provision may indeed make some parents only the more idle and extravagant; and so may that of parochial relief, or of hospitals for the sick. But for the most part, they who are thus worthless, would be equally so, if all these benefactions were abolished. The same sort of persons neglected their children, before charity schools were known, who do it now. And it is great mercy to the poor young creatures to enable them to say, *When my father and my mother forsake me, the Lord taketh me up* †.

2. In the *management* of these children, as teaching them religion is the chief thing proposed, so it ought to employ the chief attention; which it may without hindrance, indeed with advantage, to the other parts of their education. In order to this end, getting by heart their catechism, and their prayers, and select portions of scripture, is a step by no means to be omitted or despised. For experience hath taught the need of fixing thus in their memories at first, what their understandings will afterwards ripen gradually to comprehend. But if this one step be mistaken for the whole, they may be brought up in all the form of religion, with scarce any meaning accompanying it. And though very general and confused sentiments of piety and duty may often be of great use, both in directing and restraining persons, yet sometimes it is possible they may do harm; and more distinct ones cannot fail of being, in proportion, more safe and beneficial. Their teachers, therefore, should very carefully explain to them, as soon and as clearly as they can, every thing which they oblige them to repeat; and make proper trials, from time to time, of their apprehending, as well as remembering, what they are taught; in which part of their work they may be greatly

* Particularly in the girls school, belonging to the parish of St. James, Westminster.

† Psal. xxvii. 12.

ly assisted, partly by some of the printed expositions, with which they should always be furnished, and partly by informing themselves what methods are taken in the neighbouring schools of best repute. Another very advantageous and very pleasing way of increasing their acquaintance with religion, would be, turning their attention, as they read the Bible, to the more useful parts of its history, by familiar and short remarks upon them; such as their instructors can make, and they can enter into, without difficulty. Nor would it be at all a hard matter, by the help of almost any one of the small pieces written of late in defence of Christianity, to give them so much insight into the grounds and evidences of it, as will furnish them with much better reasons for believing, than they will ever have for disbelieving it. And as this is, at all times, a piece of justice due to reasonable creatures, so it is, at the present time, peculiarly necessary to a most unhappy degree.

The knowledge thus instilled, must be constantly applied to the producing of suitable dispositions. And above all, there must be diligently imprinted on their hearts a deep reverence of God, as the Almighty and all-seeing Ruler of the world; who hath given such laws to men; as he knows are necessary for their good; and will make us everlastingly happy or miserable, as we obey or transgress them. This is a principle, which will operate from the first, on every capacity, in every case; will make duty appear important, and sin dreadful; will teach them to feel the insufficiency of their natural strength, and to rejoice most heartily in the grace of the gospel; to be sincere and earnest in their prayers, regular and watchful in their lives, and through the whole of their course mindful of the end*.

Constant attendance on public worship is one inestimable benefit, which this education secures to children. And to render it as useful to them as possible, they should be diligently taught, and I doubt not but they are, to approach the house of God with the utmost seriousness; to hearken reverently to his word read and preached; and perform their part of the
liturgy

* See the Lord Bishop of Sodor and Man's sermon, preached on the same occasion with this, in the year 1724.

liturgy in such a manner as may best engage their own attention, and yet give others no disturbance, by the noise of their responses, or the loudness of their singing : concerning which particulars, express directions have been given by the trustees. The indiscretion of teaching them difficult and unusual tunes is, I hope, nearly corrected every where. But a reasonable degree of skill in the common ones, will be a needful support of the harmony of the congregation, a means of familiarizing good thoughts to their minds, and of making divine service more cheerful and pleasing to them ; which they should be engaged by every motive to frequent, as long as they live, else all that they have been taught will soon wear out, and the Lord's day become the most ruinous, instead of the most beneficial, part of their time.

It must be expected, that we should recommend to these children the faith and worship of our own communion, as all other Christians do ; and teach them that respect to the church that they are members of, and the ministers who officiate in it, which the scripture *, in very strong terms, requires they should have. But all this both may and ought to be done with such temper and prudence, as not in the least to serve the purposes of superstition and uncharitableness, or civil or religious tyranny, but of true piety and virtue alone ; which they will never learn from those of whom they think either ill or meanly. And whatever designs of carrying things further have been either justly or unjustly suspected, some time ago, in some few cases, yet there doth not appear any ground of suspicion remaining. And as I believe no set of clergy, since the world became Christian, were ever so fully and generally convinced, as ours at present, of the wickedness and folly of making attempts upon the liberties of mankind, so every observing person must see, that this danger is far from being an imminent, or an increasing one. Tragical fears, it must be owned, were entertained, or pretended, at first, of the immoderate power which the institution of these schools would give us. But time and experience hath thoroughly shewn, how very little reason there was, on any such account, either for us to be fond of the scheme, or the laity jealous of it.

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* Matth. xviii. 17. 1 Thess. v. 12, 13. Heb. xiii. 17.

The enemies of religion, indeed, will of course exclaim against the greatness of our influence, even whilst they despise us for the smallness of it: but all others may surely see cause to wish, that we had much more than we have, for good purposes; and God forbid we should either desire or use any to promote bad ones.

Next after the duties that we owe to our Maker, Christianity requires obedience to our earthly governors. And the government with which we are now blessed, is so necessary for the preservation of every thing valuable to us, that all persons of all ranks should be habituated from their earliest years to pray for it, and honour it, and live contentedly and thankfully under it; but those of low rank particularly, *to be quiet, and do their own business* *; *not exercising themselves in matters too high for them* †. And if this rule were either transgressed, or neglected, by the directors or teachers of our charity schools, it would be an insuperable objection, so long as it continued, against encouraging such of them as were thus fundamentally mismanaged. But indeed there hath been found, on repeated inquiry, very good reason to be satisfied, that the faults of this kind, which there might be once, never reached far, and have been long ago reformed. The imputation, therefore, now would be grievously unjust: but there cannot be too strict a caution to avoid all appearance, not only of disloyalty, but of every party regard of every sort, in the whole conduct of this design; for much of its support, and much of its benefit, absolutely depends upon that one thing.

Together with the habits of religion and obedience to lawful authority, these children should be taught every other that is useful and good. Their moral behaviour, a point of vastly more consequence than their learning, should be diligently watched, both in the school, and as much as possible out of it too; for which purpose they are distinguished by a peculiar dress: and their parents should be earnestly warned, not to undo what their instructors are doing. Ill-humour, idleness, indecency, lying, dishonesty, profaneness, should be severely punished as often as they are observed: and if any
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* 1 Thess. iv. 11.

† Psal. cxxxi. 1.

of them corrupts the rest, or appears incorrigible himself, he should be immediately dismissed; and no false tenderness, or mean-spirited fear of disobliging, shewn either by teachers or trustees. For maintaining the credit of a school, is the sure way of providing for the support of it.

But particularly humility should be instilled into them with singular care. They should understand, that the lowest of those whom their own parents maintain, are for that very reason their superiors; and that no education, given as an alms, can be a ground for thinking highly of themselves. Their usage in all respects should be answerable to such lessons. Cleanliness should be required of them, as far as ever their employments allow it; but no extraordinary provision should be made for it, nor the least affectation of nicety tolerated in either sex. Their clothes should be no better, if so good, as they may hope to wear all the rest of their lives; no gaiety of colour, no trifling ornaments permitted; nor any distinction between them and other children, in which they can possibly be tempted to take pleasure. If they are fed, their food should be of the coarsest sort, and not more than enough. If they are lodged, it should be in a manner that is suitable to every thing else. For, besides that frugality is a most important branch of faithfulness in the management of charities, *it is good that they should bear the yoke in their youth**; be inured to the treatment they must expect to receive: and wrong-judged indulgence is the greatest cruelty that can be exercised towards them.

These things, with others to be mentioned in their due places, require much diligence and prudence, but, if possible, yet more piety and seriousness, in their masters and mistresses. If they have the religion and morals of their children at heart, they will find means, with moderate abilities, and few and artless words, to give them a strong tincture of both. But if they are lukewarm and indifferent about the matter, they will take little pains, and be little minded; and nothing will be learnt beyond a few forms. Therefore in the choice of them, not their poverty, not the recommendation of others, not our own desire of serving them, should determine us, but merely

their fitness in these principal points ; for the want of which, no qualifications else, either natural or acquired, can ever compensate. Nor is choosing them discreetly by any means sufficient, without superintending them continually afterwards ; to examine what progress is made under them ; to excite or restrain, to praise or reprove, to support or dismiss them, as their behaviour shall give cause.

The ministers of their several parishes, I believe, do not fail, as occasion offers, to countenance and assist them, in the religious part of their work especially. And would they bestow pretty frequently some kind advice both upon them and their scholars, the good consequences of it might reach further than at the first view may appear. For if being taught their duty makes these children visibly better, other persons, it may be hoped, will teach theirs also ; but if it doth not, a hasty conclusion will immediately be drawn by too many, that religion doth harm, or at least no good.

One great help, both to the understanding and practising of religion, is being able to read. The will of God is contained in his written word : and why have we it in our mother tongue, but that all may be acquainted with it ? We are often reminded, that persons ought to judge for themselves ; this is qualifying them for it. By the means of pious books, which that excellent *Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge*, amongst their many other good works, have provided for the poor at very cheap rates, they who can read, may have at all times plain and familiar instructions and warnings concerning each part of their duty, which they can review at every leisure hour, dwell upon frequently, and fix in their hearts. Many of them cannot attend on public service near so often as they would : reading will make them some amends for this. Many grow insensibly negligent and thoughtless : reading will awaken them, and *strengthen the things that remain, and are ready to die* *. They may indeed learn wickedness from books ; but they may also learn full as much of it without them, by the discourse which they hear every day. And as good books will be put into the hands of these children first, and teach them to abhor bad ones, and enable
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* Rev. iii. 2.

them to spend their time agreeably and profitably alone, and bring them, of consequence, neither to need nor love dangerous company, there can be no doubt, in their case, on which side the benefit lies. But, besides religious advantages, being able to read is of very great use in all common business: and scarce any body hath servants who are unable, but on one occasion or another he finds considerable inconveniencies from it; which is likewise the case of writing and accounts. If, indeed, the poorer sort were to be carried on so far in the two last accomplishments, as to give them an expectation of living by their pen, it would neither be charity nor prudence, but only distressing their betters; amongst whom there are multitudes of persons thus qualified, ready at all times for employment. But some low degree of skill in this way is already too common, either to make them grow vain, or others murmur at them: and the more it approaches towards being universal, the smaller will be the danger, and the greater the benefit. In country villages, indeed, writing may be less needful; and possibly may turn the minds of the children, or of their parents for them, to some other business than husbandry. And therefore, in such places, it may perhaps be as well omitted; and, I believe, commonly is. But reading must be serviceable in all places. For however useless or hurtful to persons in low life the higher kind of improvements may be, which is a point most absurdly laboured in speaking against charity schools, where no such things are taught, yet enabling the meanest people to carry on their business more commodiously, and know their duty more thoroughly (the almost only uses they will ever find for their learning, if religiously educated), must surely have a tendency to make them better, not worse. Ignorance and stupidity, for which some, though unwilling to own it, have pleaded strenuously on this occasion*, who on others accuse the clergy as the great promoters of them, are neither virtues, nor friends to virtue. On the contrary, most of those are abundantly *wise to do evil, who to do good have no knowledge*†.

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* See *An Essay on Charity and Charity Schools*, p. 304, 353, 370.

† Jer. iv. 23.

But still, as work is what all these children are destined for, it should be constantly had in view; and they should enter upon it whilst they are at school, if possible. It will make them useful at present, and both able and willing to work afterwards. It will put vain and idle fancies out of their heads; and shew all the world, what is really aimed at. It will silence the principal objection of enemies, and remove the only scruple of many true friends. Accordingly, for some years past, it hath been strongly insisted on by almost every preacher upon the subject; warmly recommended by the worthy society before-mentioned, who were the first authors of this whole design; and is, I doubt not, as earnestly desired by the trustees, as it can be by the public, whose expectations are perfectly reasonable, excepting that they are a little too impatient.

Many right and excellent undertakings are surrounded with vastly more difficulties in the execution, than immediately shew themselves. Trustees of leisure and activity to attempt such a charge, and of skill and interest enough to conduct it with success, cannot be had in an instant for every school. Masters and mistresses, very valuable in other respects, may be unqualified in this, or too fully employed already to undertake more; adding supernumerary ones would be chargeable; and substituting better upon the whole, may at present be impracticable. Doubts also may arise, on very just grounds, what work to try. Children are not fit for all sorts: manufactures proper for them are not ready at hand every where; and setting up such on purpose, as would require any considerable number of them, might be an expence and a risk very imprudent, on so uncertain a fund as charity. Besides, where manufactures, which might be suitable to them, are established, the workmen concerned in them can usually supply them very fully with their own children; and heavy complaints would be made, and many contributions withdrawn, if others interfered to take the bread out of their mouths. It is said indeed, that hands are wanting; but the truth is, employments are wanting in most places, for these very young creatures. Their parents can make no profit of them; else they certainly would, instead of sending them to school. The parish workhouses can few of them find any work for the
children

children brought up in them, that turns to account. And most unhappily, several of these difficulties are the greatest in this city; where yet the number of those, who want such a provision, is and must be the largest.

However, till fuller employment can be had for them, they are much better employed at school, than they would be else. How are other poor children, whether maintained by their parents or the public rates, spending their time? Vifibly, the most part of them, neither in doing nor learning any one thing that is good; but as much of the contrary, as ever they will and can; whilst these are kept, all of them in a considerable degree, and such as are lodged at their schools entirely, from bad company and bad habits; from which their parents have not leisure to keep them, if they had always inclination; they are accustomed to application and confinement, to orderliness and obedience, which will greatly prepare them for keeping close to work hereafter: they are bred up in the precepts of honest industry: they have it upon their minds from the first, that they are to get their living that way, and no other; and are at last all put out to it.

Surely these considerations must have the effect, on all thinking persons, of restraining their censures, though by no means their wishes. For it is both to be wished most ardently, and endeavoured most heartily, that every obstacle to so excellent an improvement, as that of introducing work, may as soon as possible be every where overcome. This is not a thing, which you, who are the managers of these charities, are driven into; and excusing yourselves from it, as long as you can. You very well know, how important a duty industry is. You neither have, nor can have, any inducement to discourage it in this case; but all the reason in the world to the contrary; and such, as absurdly clamour against you, would give a much better and very welcome proof of their zeal, if they would assist you, and share the difficulties of the attempt with you. But, without waiting for what is so little to be expected, there are some schools, where the children do work: why may not their methods and regulations be inquired into, and imitated by others? All the new erected schools in *Ireland* join labour with instruction: probably something might be learnt from them. Persons of experience
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in various kinds of business in this great city, could surely, some of them, suggest what at least would deserve trial. For the girls especially one should think employment might be found; and for most of them, I believe, is: complete employment, where they live together; and where they do not, a good deal, in making, for instance, their own and others coarse cloaths. For as to fine work of any sort, it would be raising them above the rank for which they are intended; and might therefore be a worse and more lasting mischief, than setting them to none. What either sex can do, perhaps, will seldom turn to much profit; but merely doing any thing that tends to usefulness, will be so great an advantage to them of itself, that some danger, nay some certainty of loss by it at first, may very well be borne for the sake of it. Or to prevent this, if any person would hire, or even accept of their service, for one part of the day or week; the remainder of it might be very sufficient for their other instruction. Or whenever their parents could keep them well employed, provided assurance was given that they did so, that might be allowed; especially in the country, where, according to the different seasons of the year, there are very busy and very leisure times; and their friends will be much the readier to send them at the latter, for being sure of their assistance at the former. Their learning, it must be acknowledged, will go on the more slowly for it, and their teachers will have more trouble with them; but, sooner or later, they will be taught as much as they need. And accordingly I see with great pleasure, that the printed rules of the trustees have expressly provided, indeed for every thing right and proper in the management of their trust, that can well be thought of, but particularly for leave to be given in this case. And were there exact accounts procured from every part of the nation, what rules are observed in the several schools, with the reasons of them: I am persuaded it would be a means of vindicating them in most things, as well as directing them better in some. I shall only add further under this head, that where labour is not made part of their business, it will be adviseable, to take the children young and to keep them no longer, than till they have acquired some competent degree of knowledge and good principles.

ples. For so they will have all that they can have ; work as soon as possible, and other instruction in the mean while.

3. The manner of *disposing* of them, when they come to be dismissed, is the next point. And as all education is for the sake of what shall follow it, the trustees for them should interest themselves not a little in their future course of life ; and, so far as they can, secure their parents consent when they are admitted, to their being placed out properly.

The profane or vicious, if any such be allowed to take them, will esteem them the less, not the more, for a considerable part of what they have learnt ; and do nothing to preserve the impressions of it, perhaps a great deal to efface them ; and then will throw the whole blame of their ill behaviour on the management, under which they have been ; and charge it with every thing, that their own imaginations can suggest. Good persons therefore should always be sought out for them to go to. And they should be earnestly entreated, to keep them in the way into which they have been put ; especially to see, that they constantly attend on the Lord's days service, and make a proper use of their religious books. For some such should always be given them at their leaving the school, with a solemn charge concerning the main branches of their conduct.

But not only the persons, with whom they are placed, but the employments, in which they are fixed, should be well considered. Great numbers of them have been sent to sea ; and it is not the fault of the trustees, but of the parents, that more are not defending or enriching their country on board our ships. Of the rest, those who are bred in this town mostly become either apprentices or household servants ; and, it seems, objections are made against each method of disposing of them.

It hath been said, that they are put to retailing shopkeepers, or other easy employments, unsuitable to their original condition ; and that more money is required, and given with them, than with other children ; all which, I am assured, is absolutely false in fact. They are put, as they undoubtedly ought, to laborious working trades, and no other ; with many of them, no money at all is given ; with most of them, but forty shillings ; with some few, five pounds ; but more
with

with none. And indeed it is evident, that the friends of such an education will dispose of them as cheap as they can; were it for this reason only, that they may take in as many as they can.

Another suggestion is, that they are put out to worthless persons, in bad circumstances, who take the money, and then break. But neither of this do I find any proof. However, though a groundless assertion, it may furnish an useful warning.

But at least, it is objected further, breeding so many of them to trades occasions a scarcity of servants. Now even in this town, not two thirds of the boys, nor much above one fourth of the girls, have been put apprentices at all; and a great part of these were probably no other than household servants, taken by indenture for a term of years. What the proportion hath been in the country, doth not appear; but in all likelihood it must have been very small. Or were it otherwise, disproportions of this nature will soon rectify themselves. Where apprentices or journeymen are not wanted, and other servants are, these children will of course be sent where the demand is greatest; nor can the trustees have either inclination or power to prevent it.

But whilst one of the writers against our charity schools accuses them of lessening the number of servants*, the other charges them with increasing it†. Possibly the meaning may be, that they increase the number of the upper and idler sort, and lessen that of the lower and more laborious. Now as to this, the boys, when they come from school, are plainly incapable of the higher services; nor are many of them taken, even for footmen. And yet, what plenty soever there is of livery servants, there is so loud a complaint of the want of sober and honest ones, that I apprehend it would be no inconvenience, but a general advantage, if more of these children were put into that station, in serious and regular families: for in others they would have little chance of doing good, and a great one of being ruined. Then for the girls, as they certainly ought not either to be raised into the easier places, or qualified for them; since it would hurt both others who have
a better

* Essay, &c. p. 346.

† CATO, p. 241.

a better claim to them, and the public ; so I cannot find that they are ; but that low business, with low wages of fifty shillings, or three pounds a year at most, is what universally falls to their share, till, by a course of diligence and faithfulness, they can better their condition ; which surely then should not be envied them.

It hath been alleged indeed, that persons are unwilling to take them for servants. But, as I know this to be very false in some places ; so I hope, where it is true, it cannot be often on account of their education. Some may want servants of more strength, than these young people can have at first ; some may dislike taking so unexperienced ones ; some may think it beneath them, to have such mean creatures in their houses ; and some may be unjustly prejudiced against them in other respects, partly by false representations, and partly also by mistaken appearances. For there is a superficial pertness, very apt to spring up, at that time of life, amongst numbers bred together ; which ought to be, and I hope is, carefully kept under ; and yet may now and then give a little offence. Besides, all who are taught any thing valuable, are doubtless in some danger of esteeming themselves rather too highly upon it. But this can never be a reason, why they should be taught nothing valuable. And such trifling faults are so easily conquered in children, and will be so amply recompensed by substantial good qualities, that prudent persons will certainly think them worth trying at least. They will find them taught to their hands those good principles, which else they must think it their own duty to teach them, with no small pains. And they will find them restrained, as much as they could be, from the vices, of which they would wish them not to be guilty, and in which others of their rank are too commonly indulged. Still not all, it must be owned, prove well, either under this sort of management, or any other. Such as do, be they ever so many, have little or nothing said of them ; it is only what ought to be expected. Such as do not, occasion abundance of talk ; and all the errors, into which they run in spite of their education, are pretended to flow from it. But so far as inquiry hath hitherto been made, multitudes have proved excellently good ; few in proportion remarkably bad ; scarce any, perhaps none, have been convicted.

ed of capital crimes, excepting those who had been expelled as incurable. And if more particular inquiries were carried on in every school, as they are in some, concerning the behaviour of each child, that hath been put out either to service or apprenticeship; where they behave ill, it might give a good insight into the cause, and shew how to remove it; but I am persuaded, from what I have experienced, it would be generally found, that they behave well. To which perhaps it might add no despicable incitement, if some little reward were given to every one, who, at the end of so many years had deserved a good character. And I am told, there is a legacy left to one school, appropriated to this purpose.

But the chief objection with many persons is, that this method of education takes off great numbers from husbandry. And it must be allowed, that most of those, who are bred up by charity in or near these two cities, are fixed in or near them afterwards. But is there the least likelihood, that any of them would else have gone to country business? Do any of the other children of the poor go to it from hence? Did any of them before these schools were erected? None at all. The governors of one school* have for some years advertised, that they were desirous of sending their children to husbandry on very reasonable terms; and had they met with encouragement, which they have not, others would have followed their example. The clergy have frequently in their sermons exhorted to this way of disposing of them. The more than once mentioned *society* have advised it continually for a long time. And could any person suggest the means to so good an end, the trustees have given public assurance, that they would rejoice in it most sincerely. In the mean while, they do all that they have the power of doing: they place them in such employments, as they must have followed otherwise, if they followed any. For indeed many of them would only have been brought up to beg or steal: few would have been employed so soon; scarce any so well. As to the children in country schools, their number is so small, considering the extent through which they are dispersed, that no general inconvenience could as yet be sensibly perceived from it, even though

* That of St. Andrew's, Holborn.

though a great part of them were put out improperly. But I apprehend they are not. They are none of them removed hither; nor apter than others, so far as I can hear, to come of their own accord. Where manufactures flourish, they are as useful in them, as they could be in any thing else; where there are none, or decaying ones only, they will go to husbandry of course.

It is said indeed, that hands are greatly wanted for country work. And at particular seasons they are; but whether so very much upon the whole, as some think, may for several reasons be doubted. The wages of country servants have certainly been much raised; but so have all wages, perhaps nearly in the same proportion. And as the quantity of our wealth, real or nominal, hath increased considerably within the last half century; the prices of the things, for which we exchange it, and of labour amongst other things, must have increased by degrees, even had labourers of each kind been as numerous as ever; whereas probably they are much diminished. But then the diminution proceeds, not from these schools, but from other causes of a very different nature*. Vast multitudes of men have been employed and lost in our armies and fleets. These two great cities are increased beyond measure, and exhaust the rest of the nation. The number of unnecessary and useless servants is multiplied excessively; who corrupt one another here, and their poor neighbours when they go into the country, and teach them a fondness for the pleasures and ease of the town. Hither therefore they flock; set up for such places and such wages as they like, and behave as they think fit; support themselves by combinations, when out of place, as long as they can; and at last will take any courses, rather than wise ones. But indeed luxury and dissoluteness are spread with irreligion through our people in general, from the highest to the lowest: they must all both

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appear

* The author of the *Essay*, &c. seems to be sensible of this, when he says, p. 151, 'A thousand faults were to concur, before the inconveniencies we labour under could be produced, yet no man can doubt, but charity schools are necessary, or at least more likely to increase than redress our complaints.' This indeed is saying a great deal too much. But as others have said much more, there is no question but he would also; unless he had felt that he could not, consistently with truth or modesty.

appear and fare better than their predecessors in the same stations : they live, too many of them, in wicked and expensive lewdness, instead of honest matrimony ; by this vice, and the dreadfully pernicious one, commonly joined with it, of drinking spirituous liquors, they enfeeble and destroy themselves early, and produce no increase. These are the real causes of the complaint ; and do they owe their rise to charity schools ? So far from it, that in truth there is double occasion for such schools, in town and country both, to preserve, if it may be, some part of our poor from this dreadful plague, that rages so fatally amongst them.

But it is objected in the last place ; if this method of education hath so excellent a tendency, how comes it to pass, that instead of that mighty reformation amongst the common people, which the earlier sermons on this occasion promised from it, they are thus confessedly grown worse under the use of it, than they were before ? Now the answer is very easy. No provision of any sort for the benefit of mankind ever did, or probably ever will, come up to the expectations and hopes, which good persons, laudably zealous for it, were willing to entertain. Yet this doth not prove all such provisions to be useless or wrong. Besides, it could not well be either foreseen or suspected, forty years ago, how entirely magistrates and heads of families would neglect the religion and morals of all under their care, and with what enthusiastic vehemence others would set themselves to extirpate seriousness and order out of the world. No wonder, if such remissness and such licentiousness have done more harm, than charity schools have done good. The number educated in them, is a very small part of the poor of the nation ; and the wickedness of the rest corrupts too many of these. Still the right principles, taught them, often preserve them, and often bring them back, when nothing else would. And if this too frequently proves otherwise, it only shews the proneness of our nature to sin, and the necessity of our best care. Had none been taken, bad as we are, we had been much worse ; and had more been taken, we might have been much better. But to charge the degeneracy of a people on the very thing, that doth so much to prevent it ; and make it the reason of their being wicked, that some of them are trained up to be pious and virtuous, is a degree

of absurdity, which one scarce knows how to excuse from wilful misrepresentation.

III. I now proceed, as I am very sensible it is high time, to consider briefly, in the *third* place, What course we are to take, if neither prudent management, nor rational defences of the *good* work that we are engaged in, can altogether prevent its *being evil spoken of*; which, though very hard, hath been hitherto, and we must expect will be, the case.

Some will speak ill of it from hatred, others from indifference, to religion and virtue. For though, in reason, both unbelievers and immoral persons ought to wish, that most others, especially the poor, might be sober and honest, and for that purpose religious, and therefore ought to encourage those of them who are so, and such methods as would make the rest of them so, yet scripture * hath taught us to look for the contrary from them, and in experience we find it. They would even seem to act from a kind of principle in this matter: and persons, who have no fear in the least of society being hurt by profaneness and profligateness, affect prodigious fears of its being hurt by charity schools; do nothing, say nothing, against other evils; join in them, plead for them; but this one danger awakens all their public spirit; and they are as clear, that the education of these poor children is the cause of almost every thing they dislike, as the Heathen *Romans* were, that all the calamities which befel their empire, proceeded from the growth of Christianity. Some again, without going so great lengths, will not fail, however, to condemn what they must else contribute to support. Others are so unhappily attentive to party considerations or personal prejudices, that if a design, ever so valuable, comes from a wrong quarter, instead of being ambitious to share in the merit and the honour of it, they set themselves immediately to depreciate it, and suggest mischievous intentions in it. And every one of these motives will induce some to invent, and many more to magnify faults; to dress out facts with circumstances, that entirely alter the nature of them; and talk vehemently about things, which have been corrected long ago, as if they happened

* Amos v. 10. John xv. 19. xvii. 14. 1 John iii. 12.

pened lately, and the same ill management subsisted still. No persons, indeed, should be charged with speaking or acting from worse motives than they do; for it is both injuring and exasperating them. But every person ought conscientiously to examine what his own motives are, and prudently to consider what those of others may be; and neither be influenced by their opinions, nor their assertions, more than they deserve. For not only false, but incredible and ridiculous stories about these schools, have been confidently averred, and incautiously believed.

Nor are bad people only, but very good ones sometimes, grievously inclined to partialities and hard censures; too negligent of inquiring, too hasty in giving credit. A small, or but imagined failure, in the scheme, in the execution, in the success, of a most useful undertaking, shall cool their friendship, or provoke their enmity to it: and they strangely forget, that a few errors and defects are no reason for abandoning valuable designs, but only for amending them; and that the good arising from them, even if amendments cannot be procured, may be vastly greater than the harm. It is very afflicting, when persons, who mean well to religion, will notwithstanding take part thus with such as mean ill to it; and abet those, who have no other view than to destroy, instead of favouring the endeavours that are used to reform and improve. The watchfulness of our worthy diocesan over the management of this charity, hath kept equal pace with the malice of its forwardest adversaries*. And your care, who are trustees, hath been applied without intermission, to prevent or remedy what others have only busied themselves to rail at. Yet the faithful diligence shewn on the one side, hath been suspected and reproached; and the unrighteous accusations brought on the other, applauded and propagated.

But unjust as this treatment is, you must resolve to bear it with all possible temper and composedness. For persons, who judge and behave very wrong in relation to these schools, may yet be entitled to great regard on other accounts. And where
prejudice

* See the *directions* given by the Lord Bishop of London to the masters and mistresses of charity schools, in the Chapter-House of St. Paul's, Nov. 14. 1724.

prejudice and a kind of fashion run against any thing, as they do amongst too many in the present case, angry complaints, however well grounded, will only be despised, or excite a return of more anger; whereas mild representations will at least mollify those whom they cannot bring over. Objections therefore, and even invectives, should be patiently heard; and answers, though sufficiently given already, repeated with calmness. If real faults are found, they should be acknowledged; if proper alterations are demanded, they should be made. For though innovations, which appear very plausible, may be found, when examined, very dangerous, and therefore love of change is by no means to be encouraged, yet aversion to it may be carried to an extreme also; and persons may both intend very well, and in most things do very well, and yet material points may have been either overlooked by them at first, or gradually forgotten afterwards. Each of you singly, therefore, should always be solicitous to learn, both from friends and enemies, what will be conducive to your design; and that excellent rule, which you have so wisely established and so long observed, of stated meetings to consult together for the better conduct of it, should be strictly kept up, and diligently applied, to propose modestly, and promote unanimously, whatever may contribute either to perfect or recommend it. Only you will remember, that the former should be your chief concern; and that the reality, not the name, of a Christian and useful education, is the thing which you are to have at heart.

Such then is your duty: and if you are conscious of having taken due pains to perform it, let who will censure or ridicule you, let who will grow cool or leave you, go on with cheerfulness, and persevere to the end. For, provided it be *a zeal according to knowledge**, it is good to be always *zealously affected in a good thing†*; and not to suffer our love to wax cold, because iniquity abounds‡. Deserting such a work, after once engaging in it, not only withdraws countenance from it, but casts an imputation upon it. *Be not, therefore, overcome of evil, but, in this sense as well as others, overcome*
evil

* Rom. x. 2.

† Gal. iv. 18.

‡ Matth. xxiv. 12.

evil with good *. You have the comfort of doing much service to God and your fellow-creatures ; you have the consciousness of having endeavoured to do more. You deserve from all persons, and you will receive from all considerate persons, great honour : and were it less, you would only be the surer, that you act from a right principle, and shall obtain a large reward ; not only for all you have designed, but all you have borne, as you ought ; whether it be reproach, or whether it be disappointment. But then let your whole lives be suitable to this part : be good Christians in every respect yourselves, whilst you profess to make others such ; else you will discredit your undertaking before men, and lose your recompence from God. For though *charity shall cover the multitude of sins* †, yet this one work is only a small branch of that extensive virtue ; and were it the whole, no wilful transgressions, of which you do not so repent as to forsake them, shall ever be hid by it.

But all that the directors of this charity can do, will be much in vain, unless you, the masters and mistresses of the several schools, perform your share as you ought, in every particular, which you can either suggest to yourselves, or learn from others ; unless you go through your whole work with diligence and discretion, with patience and vigilance, with impartiality and disinterestedness, with deference and respect to those who employ you, with authority and yet mildness towards those over whom you are placed, with a tender concern for their temporal and eternal happiness, and a fearless resolution to oppose and overcome every hindrance to either. The best designs, without a suitable execution of them, are likely to end in nothing, or worse. Think then with yourselves : will you occasion all this charity, and all these objects of it, to be utterly lost by your fault ? Or will you be the authors of more good to them, and more blessedness to your own souls, than any persons of your degree possibly can in any other way ? By your endeavours and your prayers you have the latter in your power ; and God incline your hearts to it ! The impressions that can be made from
this

* Rom. xii. 21.

† 1 Pet. iv. 8.

this place at present on your poor children, can be but small, or at best short-lived. To you, therefore, I leave it, to give them the deepest sense that you are able, of the unspeakable privilege of their education, the dreadful guilt of making a bad use of it, the indispensable duty of doing justice and credit every way to the schools to which they belong; and of recompensing hereafter, as God shall enable them, the benefit which they receive.

But I must not even yet conclude, till I have in one word more reminded you all, who are here assembled, that without continual help this excellent undertaking cannot be supported; and that almost every one is capable of giving it help, more or less, in some way or another. They who have the burden of conducting it as trustees, all afford it the assistance of their purses, as well as their pains and advice. And I hope such of you as are proper will be ready, when occasion shall require, to share in the same trust. For nothing is more absolutely necessary to such a charity, than a constant succession of wise, and good, and reputable managers. But if you cannot serve it this way, serve it, however, in the much easier way, of a cheerful liberality. Its being a *good thing evil spoken of*, obliges you, who are convinced it is unjustly so spoken of, both to patronise it more earnestly, and contribute to it more bountifully. The truest objects of compassion upon earth, are young persons left, uninstructed and unrestrained, to the dangers of a corrupted nature and a vicious world. And such, without the timely interposition of a Christian spirit, would these have been, whose appearance now not only gives your eyes the pleasure of a beautiful and affecting spectacle, but your hearts the joy of beholding at once so many thousands of young candidates for usefulness in this world, and endless felicity in the next, as perhaps no nation under the sun besides hath ever seen together. Let us comfort ourselves in the prospect, and oppose it to the very gloomy ones that we have around us. Amongst the poor our religion first had its rise; and there at least it may yet maintain its ground, till it *shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward**, amongst other ranks of men. We are following the original

* Isa. xxxvii. 31.

plan of the divine wisdom, in making provision for revealing *those things to babes*, which *the wise and prudent* in their own eyes have *hid from themselves* *. And may God, *out of the mouths of these babes and sucklings* †, ordain and perfect praise to his holy name, and *strength* to the kingdom of his ever-blessed Son !

* Matth. xi. 25.

† Psal. viii. 2. Matth. xxi. 16.

S E R M O N CXXXIII.

(Preached in the Parish-Church of St. James, Westminster,
March 11. 1749-50, on Occasion of the Earthquake,
March 8.)

ON THE REVERENCE DUE TO DIVINE PROVIDENCE, ON OC-
CASION OF STRIKING CALAMITIES TO NATIONS OR CITIES.

PSALM ii. 11.

*Serve the Lord with fear; and rejoice unto him with reve-
rence.*

THE passion of fear is an extremely necessary one for all creatures, whose good or evil depends on their behaviour: for it prompts them instantly to avoid whatever would harm them; and accordingly God hath given it a strong and deep root in human nature. But as our frame is disordered throughout, we are liable, in this respect, as well as many more, now to exceed, now to be deficient; and fearing too little, on some occasions, is the cause of our fearing, on others, much more than else we should need. Religion, if we permit it, will regulate all our inward feelings to our present and eternal advantage; and is particularly serviceable, not only in exciting, but directing and moderating this. Without religion, there may be endless alarms. Were not the world governed by infinite justice and goodness, every person that would, might, in multitudes of cases, do any hurt to others with impunity; and all mischief of all kinds befall us, however innocent, singly or jointly, through the whole course of life, unalleviated

by a prospect of recompence after death. Nay, indeed, as nothing hinders, but that, if it were possible for us to exist without God here, it might be possible hereafter too, there could be no certainty that death itself would end our sufferings, or even would not increase them. But the knowledge of a gracious and wise Providence entirely secures us, if we believe it as we ought, not only against all imaginations of inexorable fate and blind chance, but all real detriment from the worst efforts of men or devils. For *if God be for us, who can be against us* *? It is very true, religion banishes these objects of apprehension, by substituting in their room another, unspeakably more formidable than them all. *I say unto you, my friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom you shall fear. Fear him, which after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell: yea, I say unto you, Fear him* †. And did not reason afford us hope, and scripture assurance, of his accepting and rewarding us, on most equitable terms, our condition under the divine government would be surrounded with incomparably greater terrors than any other possibly could. But since we know the means of obtaining his favour, in this life and the next, if we will but use them conscientiously, the awe, which we cannot but feel, of an Almighty arm, will be sweetly mixed with faithful love; and those things, which give others the most grievous disturbance, will not need to give us the least. *Fear ye not their fear, neither be afraid: but sanctify the Lord of hosts, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread; and he shall be a sanctuary* ‡. First, therefore, learn to *serve the Lord with fear*, and then you will be entitled to *rejoice unto him with reverence*.

The word of God, far from encouraging groundless and superstitious horrors, cautions against them strongly. In all ages and nations, men have been terrified with eclipses of the sun and moon; in many, with conjunctions, oppositions and aspects of the stars, and other celestial appearances; things altogether harmless. Therefore such frights the prophet expressly condemns. *Thus saith the Lord, Learn not the way of*

* Rom. viii. 31.

† Luke xii. 4, 5.

‡ Is. viii. 12, 13, 14.

of the Heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven, because the Heathen are dismayed at them: for the customs of the people are vain *. But whatsoever things are real instruments of our Maker's will, we are to consider as such; and respect all that is wrought by them, as proceeding from his appointment. Were we sure of living ever so long on earth; we are absolutely in his hands all the time we live; and ought to be deeply sensible, that our happiness or misery, even here, depends continually upon him. But he hath passed a sentence of death on us all, to be executed, at furthest in a few years; and this furnishes a new motive to seriousness of heart, which we should be recollecting daily and hourly. But instead of that, we contrive all possible means never to think of it; and we succeed too well. Therefore to awaken us from this lethargy, he hath ordained besides, that the whole of life shall be full of diseases and accidents, to cut it short on a sudden, often when there was least cause to expect them; and here is a more pressing call to *consider our latter end* †. But however surprising each of these may be, when it happens very near us: yet, as one or another of them happens pretty frequently; for that very reason, though they ought to affect us the more, they scarce affect us at all. Therefore he also brings on, from time to time, the less common, and more widely destructive events, of wars and pestilences. Of the former we have for several years, not long past, had heavy experience. And what we see and hear to this day of the latter amongst our cattle, tells us, one should think, in a very interesting manner, to what we are subject ourselves. But if all these things fail of the good effects, which he proposes by them, as it is notorious they do with us most lamentably: he hath in reserve more alarming methods of admonition still: one in particular, by which he shakes whole cities, whole countries and nations, sometimes to the extent of many hundred leagues at once, notwithstanding the intervention of large and deep seas; and hath frequently taken away the lives of thousands in a moment, by a ruin, which no wisdom can foresee, no caution prevent, no strength withstand, no art evade.

You

* Jer. x. 2, 3.

† Deut. xxxii. 29.

You have often read and heard of such threatenings and devastations elsewhere ; but did not look on them, as having the least relation to yourselves. Possibly some of you imagined, that this part of the world was exempt from them. But indeed your ancestors have felt them many times recorded in history, probably many more. However, that, you may think, was long ago ; and would be long enough, before it happened again. Yet not a few persons, now alive, remember one earthquake in this city ; and that you may not dream of being safer than they, Providence hath taken care, that you shall feel another. Still, when you had escaped one shock, perhaps you thought the danger was over. Therefore you have felt a stronger. And which of you can be sure, that this will prove the last ?

But you will say, Neither these nor the former have done any harm ; and therefore why should we fear it from future ones ? But let me tell you, earthquakes have done harm in this kingdom, in this town ; overturned many private houses, many churches, not without the loss of many lives. But if that were otherwise, have we any reason to doubt, but the causes of earthquakes are the same here as in other places ? Why then may not the effects be the same in our days, though formerly they have been less ? Who can look into the bowels of the earth and assign a reason ? Place the cause, if you will, contrary, I think, to plain evidence, not in the earth, but the air, what will you gain by it ? Would not a very little more force, nay a few moments longer continuance of the same force, that shook our houses the other morning, have buried many or most of us under them, whencesoever it came ? And if it had, let us ask ourselves, were we in due readiness to have appeared before God ?

No longer than fifty-seven years ago, when the last earthquake before these was felt here ; within a few months of the same time, near 2000 persons were destroyed in a moment by one at *Jamaica* ; and near 100,000 by another in *Sicily*. Not three years and a half ago, in *Lima*, the principal city of *Peru*, containing 60,000 inhabitants, 5,000 perished by an earthquake in less than three minutes, and but twenty-five houses were left standing. At the sea port of *Callao*, belonging to it, not one building, not one ship escaped, and only 100 inhabitants

tants out of 7,000: nor were there fewer, than sixty flocks more, in thirty days. Indeed at the same place, they return generally about once a month, and with great violence once in a few years. Ought the consideration of these things to have no effect upon us? Allowing them not to prove, that we ever shall be in so dreadful a situation; yet they prove, that, for aught we know, we may; they shew, in a strong light, the terrors of divine power; and should remind us of all the other reasons, that we have, to stand in awe of it, both in this world and a future one; of which we ought to think without such warnings; but if we can be thoughtless in the midst of them, we are void of all excuse. By taking pains for it, we may bring ourselves to imagine the sufferings of others, no concern of ours; and our own danger, a very slight one. But do we resolve then, that nothing shall move us, but what will destroy us? That we will not repent, unless we are attacked by a judgment, that will leave multitudes of us no time to repent? You have, in the revelation of St. *John*, this prophetic description: *And the same hour there was a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell; and in the earthquake were slain of men, seven thousand; and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven**. Had it not been much better, that all should have been preserved, by giving glory to God in time? And who can be certain, in such a case, that he may not be one amongst those, who perish, however few?

But suppose we could be assured, that this land of ours would for ever be exempted from the severe visitations, which so many others have long undergone, do still, and are likely to undergo, who hath exempted us? *Who hath made us to differ†?* Do we owe him nothing on that account; that *the lot is fallen unto us in so fair a ground, that we have so goodly a heritage‡?* And ought such mild admonitions from God, as we have lately received, of what he could do, and doth not, to pass by us unregarded? Do we *despise the riches of his goodness and forbearance, instead of knowing, that it leads us to repentance§?* The countries that suffer most, have no right to

* Rev. xi. 13.

† Pl. xvi. 7.

† 1 Cor. iv. 7.

§ Rom. ii. 4.

to complain. He hath doubtless wife, though unsearchable reasons, for subjecting them to the calamities, from which he hath preserved others; and he will sufficiently distinguish hereafter the good and the bad, whom at any time he involves in a common calamity here. Yet surely we are glad, every one of us, that we are not in their condition; and whatever we have cause to be glad of, we have cause to be thankful for it, to the author of all good.

But perhaps you will say: "These things are natural; and therefore what foundation is there for considering them in a religious light?" But supposing they are, which is more than we know, is not the whole frame of things, of our bodies and our souls, natural? And are we therefore to consider none of them in a religious light, we are to consider, them all so. Life and death are natural. Judgment, heaven and hell, are just as natural. For what is nature? The order established by a wise and holy God. And must he not design, that we should learn from every part of it, especially the most striking parts, to honour him, and *fear before the Lord**? He foresaw from the beginning, that constant and uniform impressions on our minds would be apt to grow faint and languid. Therefore he interwove, in his original scheme, incidents that should alarm us from time to time. Is that provision of his a reason, why we should not be alarmed?

Terror alone indeed is of no use. And God forbid, that I should endeavour to raise it in any of you, were nothing better likely to follow. But generally speaking, it is the first, the strongest motive to reformation. And though dread of future punishments ought to have, that of present often hath, the most powerful influence in exciting sentiments of piety, and thence of virtue; which are both of them practised afterwards from more ingenuous principles. *With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early. For when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness*†. And this particular judgment, of which we have had, in comparison, so gentle an intimation, appears from scripture to have been peculiarly intended and employed, through successive generations.

* Haggai, i, 12.

† Is. xxvi. 9.

tions, to give mankind a sense of reverence and duty towards him, *who removeth the mountains, and overturneth them in his anger; who shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble* *. When the law was delivered at mount Sinai, the whole mountain, we read, *quaked greatly* †. When *Coreb* and his company rebelled against the Lord; the ground that was under them *clave asunder, the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up: they went down alive into the pit; and the earth closed upon them, and they perished from among the congregation* ‡. In the day of *Saul*, when the Lord avenged Israel of the Philistines, *there was a trembling in the field; and the earth quaked; it was a trembling of God* §. When he delivered *David* from the hand of his enemies, *the very foundations of the hills shook and were removed, because he was wroth* ||. When his own people provoked him to displeasure, his threatening in *Isaiab* is: *Thou shalt be visited of the Lord of hosts with thunder, and with earthquakes, and great noise, with storm and tempest* ¶. Sometimes indeed expressions, like these, may signify only disorders and commotions in kingdoms and states, such as we experienced not many years ago, and had reason to pray with the psalmist: *O God, thou hast cast us off, thou hast scattered us, thou hast been displeased: O turn thyself to us again. Thou hast made the earth to tremble: heal the breaches thereof, for it shaketh* **. But there was in *Isaiab's* age a literal earthquake, so considerable, that we find it served afterwards, both for a date, to mark times ††, and, even at the distance of two hundred years, for a proverbial description of terror: *Ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before the earthquake, in the days of Uzziab, king of Judah* ‡‡. Again, *Jeremiab* sets forth the wickedness of the Jewish nation, too like our own, and its consequences, thus: *My people is foolish, they have not known me: they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge. I beheld the mountains, and lo, they trembled; and all the hills moved lightly. I beheld, and lo, there was no man: the fruitful place was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the pre-*

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* Job. ix. 5, 6.

† Exod. xix. 18.

‡ Numb. xvi. 31, 32, 33.

§ 1 Sam. xiv. 15.

|| Ps. xviii. 7.

¶ Is. xxix. 6.

** Ps. ix. 1, 2.

†† Amos i. 1.

‡‡ Zech. xiv. 5.

sence of the Lord, and by his fierce anger *. Once more, God is introduced in the prophet *Ezekiel*, using these words: *In my jealousy, and the fire of my wrath, have I spoken: surely in that day there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel; so that the fishes of the sea, the fowls of the heaven, and the beasts of the field, and all the men that are upon the face of the earth, shall shake at my presence; and the mountains shall be thrown down, and the steep places fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground: thus will I magnify myself in the eyes of many nations; and they shall know, that I am the Lord* †.

Nor doth the Old Testament only give us these awful ideas; but in the New, no less than three of the four evangelists record our Saviour to have foretold, that, before his coming to judgment, *Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven: all these are the beginning of sorrows* ‡. Now most of these, it must be owned, we have seen and felt. Yet I am far from concluding, and would counsel others not to be rash in concluding any thing in relation to *the times and seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power* §. But we are authorised to conclude, that such visitations may be tokens of wonderful changes, in the natural, in the civil world; as indeed the book of *Revelation* affords a ground to believe, that, sooner or later, they will: describing many grand periods of time, as introduced by these fore-runners. Or however that be, we cannot err in concluding, that a *God so great in counsel and mighty in work, must have his eyes open on all the ways of the sons of men, to give every one according to the fruit of his doings* ||. Whether at the present time, whether in the present life, appears not yet. And I would not terrify the worst sinner among you beyond reason. Possibly we may feel no more of these shocks. Possibly no damage may attend them if we do. But is possibility, is probability, in a matter so totally out of sight, firm ground enough for you to risk your souls upon? Even were it certainty,
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* Jer. iv. 22—26.

† Math. xxiv. 7, 8. Mark xiii. 8. Luke xxi. 11.

‡ Acts i. 7.

† Ezek. xxxviii. 19, 20, 23.

|| Jer. xxxii. 19.

hath God no other means, than earthquakes, to deal with men as they deserve? Or is not every part of the creation ready to execute his vengeance, whenever he bids it. Surely then you should have immediate recourse to the scripture remedy, the only infallible one, against this and all dangers, *stand in awe, and sin not* *.

But perhaps you will object; "We are not convinced that our danger, be there ever so much, proceeds from sin. We are not greater sinners than others; they that suffer most by sudden strokes, are not greater; our Saviour hath told us, that they are not †." But he said it of some only, not of all; and to what end did he say it of those? To make men thoughtless and careless about themselves? No; entirely to make them charitable in their judgments about their brethren. On what foundation then do we of this nation, this city, say, we are not worse than others? I am sensible, the countries around us are very wicked. And it might be as fruitless, as it would be a melancholy employment, to examine, which are worse, we or they. Yet surely our luxury and extravagance, our debauchery and intemperance, our madness for pleasure from the highest to the lowest, our selfishness and profligate corruption, our uncharitable divisions, alas! our many other sins that might be named, are not easily paralleled any where else. But supposing them to equal us in this horrid competition; do they sin as openly, as avowedly as we, *glorying in their shame* ‡? Are they unpunished, unrestrained, I had almost said indulged, as here? I conceive not. Or if they were as boldly and securely vicious in common life; are they as regardless too of him that made them? I believe no one nation in the Christian world is, or ever was. Many individuals may; but is the generality, the bulk of high and low, so profane any where; so contemptuously negligent of God, and, in consequence of that, so utterly destitute of all prospect and all principle of amendment? Or admitting even this; yet, in many other nations, ill-grounded, superstitious, unworthy opinions make up a considerable part of their religious belief; on which account, it is more excusable, if some are tempted to despise the whole; while others

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* Pl. iv. 4.

† Luke xiii. 2, &c.

‡ Phil. iii. 19.

rely on empty forms, or impious observances, even to appease God on such occasions, as the present. But you have a rational and moral religion, with plain instructions in it, and home exhortations to live suitably to it, pressed upon you continually; and you *love darkness rather than light, because your deeds are evil**. Nay, more than a few, not content to disobey it, ridicule it, inveigh against it, teach others to do so too; some, in mere wanton gaiety; others, with a zeal quite enthusiastic. And for what end? Have they a system of doctrines and precepts to set up, more honourable to the Supreme Being, more beneficial to human society, better fitted to enlighten the understanding, to dignify the heart? And is it to establish this, that they depreciate Christianity? No; however highly and extravagantly some of them, now and then, affect to talk of natural religion; yet in fact, none of them, so far as appears, either practise or statedly profess it; but they live *without God, and die without hope*†. Nor have we only our means of knowledge, but our liberty, our plenty, our numberless mercies of every kind, to aggravate our transgressions. And still can we plead, that we are no worse than others? Or if we could, what comfort is there in that, if we are bad enough to deserve God's indignation; and growing yearly and daily to deserve a higher degree of it; abounding more and more in our old vices, and adding new and unnatural ones to them? Doth our Saviour say, that such, as can flatter themselves, they are not greater sinners than others, need not be afraid? Quite the contrary, he saith, *Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish*‡. And, I beg you observe, the general terror of that saying hath now been particularly pointed towards this city, the head-quarters and example of wickedness to the whole island. This very place hath been the centre, both of the first and the second flock; and they have extended but few miles round it. Doth not that look very like an especial denunciation against us? And should it not incline us to take the prophet's direction: *The voice of the Lord crieth unto the city; and the man of wisdom shall see thy name: bear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it*§.

Some,

* John iv. 19.

† Eph. ii. 12.

‡ Luke xiii. 3.

§ Mic. vi. 9.

Some, I am told, have resolved to fly away from hence upon it, and then imagine they shall be out of all hazard. But do you hope to fly from God? Fly from your iniquities to God, if you would be safe. Other precautions will avail you little. You had one alarm a month ago. Have you left off a sin or a folly since, done a deed of charity, or made a hearty prayer the more for it? The public appearance of things, I am sure, hath been almost in all respects the same; and in very many such as it ought by no means to be. You have now had a second and more terrifying admonition. Hath even that brought you to any determinate good resolutions? If not, what do you think will? And what must become of you, if nothing do? Mistake me not to mean, that this one fright should have more effect upon you singly, than all the standing motives to reformation put together. But still, when it hath peculiarly awakened you, and revived the impressions of them all on your minds, if you suffer them to wear out again, and relapse into your former inconsiderateness, you will be too likely to sleep on, till your final ruin overtakes you. This warning was designed for a signal mercy to you. If you slight it, what can you expect, but to be left for the future to the hardness of your own hearts? Even should more of the same kind follow, it is most likely that you will grow accustomed to them; and like thousands of poor wretches abroad, pursue your sins fearlessly, with all the elements, in their turn, threatening from time to time immediate perdition to you.

But, it may be, more than a few of you have felt no small convictions for some days past; only you dare not express them, either in words or behaviour, because the rest of the world would despise you. Yet perhaps, all the while, many of them are under just the same difficulty. You are afraid of their contempt, they are afraid of yours; and would you, on both sides, discover your sentiments, you would support one another in what is right, instead of awing one another into what is wrong. But were you to stand single; are you to stifle and bely your fear of God for fear of man? Remember what our Lord and Master hath declared to those who *are ashamed of him and his words, in a sinful and adulterous generation.*

generation *. Very probably, in the days of *Noah*, in those before the overthrow of *Sodom*, there were persons disturbed not a little within, at the lives they led, and the threatenings they heard; but still, they knew not how to do otherwise than all around them did. So they went on with the crowd: *they eat, they drank, they planted, they builded, they bought, they sold, they married, they were given in marriage; and knew not, till the flood came, and took them away; till it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all* †.

But you will say, "Are we then, at such times as these, to lay aside the common business and offices of life?" On no account. Lay them aside always on this day, as much as you can: but on others, it is not following them, it is not attending to them diligently, the far greatest part of your time; but attending to them so as to neglect or break through higher obligations, that is the sin. The proper employments of each persons station are duties to which God hath called him: but they are to be done from an inward principle of submission to his will, with a just sense of the vanity of this world, of the importance of the next, and with a serious care, *so to pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal* ‡.

"But if business be allowable, are not diversions too?" With what intent do you ask this? Is it not indeed, that you may exclaim against your teachers, it may be your religion also, as unreasonably rigid, if we answer one way; and pretend, that we approve of your going on just as you do, if we answer the other way? Come with a better meaning, and ask, and you shall have satisfaction. But you may have it now. We dare not take upon us to say, that all amusements are unlawful, to all persons, at all times. We believe they are often innocent, sometimes useful and requisite. But we must say, and would to God the people of this land would hear us, for they have great need; that living to them, and doating on them, in the manner now commonly practised, is a heinous, crying, pernicious sin. Fortunes are impaired and ruined; creditors postponed and defrauded; healths worn out, and

* Mark viii. 38. † Matth. xxiv. 38, 39. Luke xvii. 27, 28, 29.

‡ Collect, 4th Sunday after Trinity.

and lives thrown away; children taught nothing that they ought, and initiated early into every thing that they ought not; family, private, public affairs, disregarded; modesty undermined, and common honesty put to trials, which often get the better of it; and all by the means of such a mad pursuit of pleasure and entertainment of every kind, real or imaginary, through almost every waking hour, as was formerly unknown here, but hath been of late years continually increasing; and is, if there be possible room for it, increasing still, and spreading wider, amongst all ranks of people, in defiance to religion, to reason, to law: even they who make the laws, they who should execute them, they who should see that their inferiors execute them, joining openly in the violation of them, and so inviting all around them to do the same.

But could all these mischiefs be avoided in such a course of life; yet is it nothing, that your time, your thoughts, your souls are filled with trifles and follies; that you are engaged in them too late over night, to attend here the next morning on the worship and instruction which your Maker hath appointed; that such multitudes, instead of so important a work, spend the former part of this holy day in needless visitings and airings, idle excursions and parties; and not a few, the latter part in debauchery or gaming; that you lay aside, it may be feared entirely, the most improving duties of self-inspection and private prayer; forget God, and give yourselves up to the world; that you cling to these vanities, even at the age when they become you the worst, till you drop into eternity, with your heads and your hearts full of nothing else; and yet, on the merit of this wise conduct, apprehend yourselves entitled to scorn, instead of honouring, those who act on other principles?

If you cannot use diversions, without running into such lengths, indeed without danger of coming in sight of them, you are bound, as you value your salvation, not to use them at all. And though you can use them ever so safely, it will both be pious, prudent and charitable, to abstain from all of them often, and from some of them perhaps altogether; were it only to guard others, to whom they may be less safe; and to shew the world, what it seems to have no remaining notion of, that life may be supported, may be enjoyed, without them.

The present season of Lent used to be a testimony of this : but of late all methods have been employed to make it a testimony of the contrary ; by crowding into it, and even into the most sacred week of it, as many entertainments, both in private houses and public theatres, as can be contrived. If these things are wrong, why may not you take the present opportunity, when you have had so loud a call to seriousness, for beginning to practise a little more of it than ordinary ; and, for that purpose, keep back from some places, to which else you might have gone ? Let others guess the reason. If they ask, let them know it. If they deride you, either enter upon the subject, or avoid it, as you see a likelihood, or none, of doing good ; but at least keep to your point, with temper, with charity, yet with resolution.

“ But if we act thus, all the world will shun us ; we shall “ be left alone : what shall we do ? ” The more valuable part of the world will not shun you ; and the loss of some of your company may be very far from doing harm. It is likely you will have a good deal more time to yourselves ; but can you not find, have you not already, full employment for it ? Discreet conduct of your own affairs, kind assistance of others, needful care of your health, proper improvement of your mind in useful knowledge, these things may surely fill up no small part of your day. But there is another work, the most necessary of all, the *one thing needful* * ; to which, perhaps, you have not applied, near so much as it requires, near so much as you imagine ; I mean a serious practical attention to your spiritual state. Surely you must be sensible, that the business of a Christian is, not only to abstain from gross wickedness, and observe the forms of piety, but to mortify that *love of the world* and of pleasure, which is inconsistent with *the love of the Father* † ; and *set our affections on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God* ‡ ; to cultivate and exercise equity, mildness and charity towards all men ; and perform, from a right principle, every duty of every social relation ; yet to know, that after all *we are unprofitable servants* § ; and must rely, not on our own righteousness, but the mercy of the gospel. Great numbers amongst
you

* Luke x. 42.

† 1 John ii. 15.

‡ Col. iii. 1, 2.

§ Luke xvii. 10.

you doubtless are, and may long, perhaps always, have been, what common language calls moral, and even religious persons; but are you what an awakened conscience, what the *scripture of truth* *, calls so? Compare that, and the directions which wise and good men have drawn out of it for your use, with your past actions, words, and thoughts. Examine both well, without frightening yourselves unreasonably, or accusing yourselves unjustly, but without flattering yourselves at all; remembering that God is merciful, but remembering also that he is holy. This alone may prove no short task. And if the inquiry end on the whole in your favour, as God grant it may, frequent reflections, that your Maker is your friend, and heaven your inheritance, will enable you to pass your future days very joyfully, how little forever may be contributed of superficial happiness from any other quarter. But at the best, you will assuredly perceive at the same time, what will give you still further occupation, many things in yourselves to beg forgiveness for, to amend, to watch over. And should you find, as I fear too many of you will, that *your heart as yet is not right in the sight of God; that you are still in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity* †; here will be work enough for you to do, though every thing unnecessary be left undone; to humble yourselves before him with deep contrition; to lay hold on his offered mercy, with true faith in the merits of his Son; to pray for his grace, and use it; to *cleanse yourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit* ‡. Never ask what you shall do with your spare time, till you have gone through these things. And when you have, if the late providential warning hath been, in the least degree, the occasion of your undertaking them, you will bless God to your dying day for the alarm which it gave you.

Amidst the innumerable and inestimable privileges belonging to those who have *acquainted themselves with him, and are at peace* §, one, peculiarly proper to be mentioned now, is, that while they preserve their integrity, they will never have cause to be dismayed or disturbed at whatever happens in this world. Some good persons, indeed, may be tempted to accuse themselves of an irreligious insensibility, that they have felt

* Dan. x. 21. † Acts viii. 21, 23. ‡ 2 Cor. vii. 1. § Job xxii. 21.

no more on the late occasion : but if, on any occasion, they have felt enough to make them fear God and serve him, let them never be grieved at what, in all likelihood, is merely constitutional, if it be not rather a pious serenity. We read, that when *Elijah stood before the Lord*, first a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks ; but the Lord was not in the wind : after the wind was an earthquake ; but the Lord was not in the earthquake : after the earthquake was a fire ; but the Lord was not in the fire : after the fire was a small still voice, and in that God spake to his servant *. If then he hath spoken to us ever so gently, and we have heard him, it should be matter of comfort, not despondency, that he hath found no need of using words of terror to us. But a much commoner case is, that pious minds are struck on these extraordinary manifestations of divine power, with great sudden horror. So was *David* : *My flesh trembleth for fear of thee ; and I am afraid of thy judgments* †. So was *Moses* at mount *Sinai*, when he said, *I exceedingly tremble and quake* ‡. Therefore never do you, of weaker spirits, either think ill of yourselves, or wonder if your feelings are both more painful and more durable than you wish. Still they are essentially different from those of wicked persons. Your dependence on God will enable you to check your apprehensions, in some measure, when at the highest, and in a while to recover your former tranquillity : to say with *Job*, *Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him* § : or in the more triumphant language of the Psalmist : *God is our hope and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear, though the earth be moved, and though the hills be carried into the midst of the sea* ||. The whole frame of nature, and every thing that comes to pass in it, is friendly to persons in earnest religious, and works together for their good ¶. Life or death, things present or things to come, all things are theirs, and they are *Christ's*, and *Christ is God's* **. Earthquakes in particular, terrible as they appear, have often been marks of God's favour to his people. There was one at the death, another at the resurrection of our blessed Lord ; the two great bul-

warks

* 1 Kings xix. 11, 12.

† Ps. cxix. 120.

‡ Heb. xii. 21.

§ Job xiii. 15.

|| Ps. xlv. 1, 2.

¶ Rom. viii. 28.

** 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23.

warks of Christian comfort. *At the day of Pentecost, there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind* *, probably somewhat resembling the sound which you heard so lately. In a short time after, on the first attempt of persecuting the disciples, *when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and spake the word of God with boldness* †. Again, when Paul and Silas were imprisoned, while they sang praises unto God, *suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken, and all the doors opened; which was immediately followed by the conversion of the jailor and his family, and the deliverance of the apostle and his companion by the magistrates* ‡. Why then should that so greatly affright you, which hath ministered to so many others cause of thanksgiving?

“It is somewhat extremely awful.” So is every thing that reminds us, with any strength, of God and our latter end. And yet, if we are not reminded of them effectually, we are undone to eternity. It is not near so awful, as what you, notwithstanding, profess to desire and pray for; the time when he shall come to *sit on his throne, from whose face earth and heaven shall flee away, and no place be found for them* §. “But we may be swallowed up instantly.” You may this very instant. And so you may die, every moment, a thousand other ways besides. But do you not consider in whose power it is whether you shall or not? Cannot God preserve you? And will he not, if it be for your advantage? Hear the Psalmist: *Who so dwelleth under the defence of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night, nor the destruction that wasteth at noon-day. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. With thine eyes shalt thou behold, and see the reward of the ungodly* ||. But if he thinks it proper you should die now, why is it not best for you? Shall you not escape by it innumerable unknown temptations and hazards to your soul, and be safe and happy for ever? Humility bids you pray against

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* Acts ii. 1, 2.

† Acts iv. 31.

‡ Acts xvi. 25, &c.

§ Rev. xx. 11.

|| Ps. xci. 1, 5, 6, 7, 8.

sudden death : but resignation bids you receive it very contentedly, if after all God chooses it for you. In the most important sense, no death is sudden, for which you are prepared ; and good persons are prepared always.

But perhaps this kind of visitation alarms you, not merely as a dangerous one, but as a token that God is angry. And he is so ; but with whom ? Not with the good. Or if he be, it is only a fatherly displeasure that we do not become better. And is not any way of shewing that infinitely kinder than leaving us unreprieved, and letting us grow worse ? If then you perceive yourselves to have been falling into sin or negligence, be thankful for so timely a warning, and reform. But if you do not, or if you have rectified your course, for the honour of religion be of good courage. Keep far, indeed, from levity of heart, speech and behaviour, especially in relation to a providence, intended to produce very different effects ; but still maintain and express a peaceful, a cheerful composure ; nor let it once be said, that you were in the greatest fear, who have cause for none, while they were in none, who have cause for the greatest. Yet if you cannot help this, consider it only as a very pardonable weakness in yourselves ; and instead of entertaining even a momentary thought of envying them, recollect with tender pity, how swift the hour of that inconceivably more terrible shock is coming upon them, which the words of St. *John* describe in so awaking a manner. *And I beheld, and lo there was a great earthquake : and the sun became black as sackcloth, and the moon became as blood, and the stars fell unto the earth, and the heaven departed as a scroll, when it is rolled together, and every mountain and island were removed out of their place. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich and the mighty, and every bond-man, and every free-man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and the rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb ; for the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand* ?* If you desire to be able, your only way is, to obey his commands during life, who is to deter-
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* Rev. vi. 12,—17.

mine your everlasting state after death ; observing the apostle's exhortation, with which I conclude: *See that ye refuse not him, that speaketh. For if they escaped not, who refused him that spake on earth, at the delivery of the law ; much more shall not we, if we turn away from him, that speaketh from heaven ; whose voice then shook the earth ; but he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake, not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made ; that those, which cannot be shaken, may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom, that cannot be moved ; let us have grace, whereby we may serve him acceptably, with reverence and godly fear ; for our God is a consuming fire*.*

* Heb. xii. 25,—29.

S E R M O N CXXXIV.

(Preached at the Parish-Church of St. James, Westminster,
December 30. 1750. on resigning the Rectory.)

A TRUE CHRISTIAN PASTOR'S VALEDICTORY ADDRESS TO
HIS FLOCK.

2 COR. xiii. 11.

Finally, brethren, farewell.————

YOU have expected, for several months, what you will immediately understand the choice of these words to import, my resignation of the office of your minister. If any one blames me, or is sorry for it, I intreat him to consider: Above seventeen years and a half have passed over my head in this place. I have spent the flower and vigour of my life in your service; and now I find, and must expect to find, myself growing less fit every day for the duties of so laborious a cure. You would not wish to wear me quite out before my time; I would not wish to be burthensome, without being useful to you; and it is much better, that you should be grieved at my departure, than weary of my stay; that I should leave you, while I can do something, than continue with you, when I can do nothing; and convenient opportunities of removing are not likely, as you must be sensible, to happen frequently. Besides, the care of my diocese requires me to be absent from you near half my time; another person may be able to bestow his upon you almost entirely. In so long a space I have given offence probably to more persons than I am aware; whether just offence, is not for me to say, my successor will have offended no one. I have undergone
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some pretty severe trials, with such temper and spirits as I could; but how either would hold out, in my declining age, to undergo more of them, I cannot foresee. And therefore, on the the whole, I hope it will not be imputed to me as a fault, that I have accepted of the offer, which his majesty's goodness hath been induced to make me. I did not solicit to be brought amongst you; nor have I solicited to quit you. I had a large income in the church, when I came hither; I have not enriched myself by my abode here; I shall not enrich myself by going from hence. Hitherto I trust I have not remarkably consulted my own ease; and hereafter, through God's grace, I shall be diligent according to my ability, both in preaching and other duties of my profession. But it must not be thought strange, if, amongst these, I chiefly devote myself to the private study of the holy scripture, and the daily attendance on divine worship, in the station to which I am retiring. I return you my heartiest thanks for your kind acceptance of my labours, for your indulgence, for your liberality to me. I humbly ask your pardon for failings and omissions, which I am sensible have been many; though I can truly say, that I have always uprightly endeavoured to promote your good in every thing, spiritual and temporal; and would willingly think I need not add, that I have in no instance attempted to do you injustice. If in any I can properly serve this parish, or any member of it, I shall ever embrace the occasion with pleasure. And for the best proof that I can give at present, of that disposition, I beg leave to mention a few things at parting, about your parochial affairs, your future minister, and yourselves, which I conceive may be useful to you; and concerning which I beseech you to bear the same freedom of speech from me, that you have allowed me to use, on other subjects, for so many years past.

I begin with your civil affairs. For both the management of them, and the judgment passed upon it, are points that may considerably affect, not only your interest, but your conscience too. Conducting them right is matter of conscience, on one hand; and abstaining from unjust accusations or suspicions, and feeling sentiments of just gratitude is so on the other. In some of these matters I have had a share, jointly with your other vestrymen; and should by no means do them justice;

were I to omit saying, that I have found those of them, who have attended, impartially and disinterestedly studious, as might indeed be expected from their ranks and characters, of promoting your general welfare; and rectifying errors, and framing and executing due regulations. To these, therefore, in particular, I make my grateful acknowledgments for the assistance and support, which they have so constantly and unanimously afforded me, in the most friendly and obliging manner. Nor are they few or small things, which, on a fair inquiry, you will find to have been done by them for your advantage, within the last twenty years; and that more have not, is principally owing to this, that their authority extends to a less part of your concerns by far, than I believe you commonly imagine. For instance, it doth not extend to the most important article, the care of your poor; concerning the maintenance of whom, however, they have, in my time, drawn up and recommended rules, that were the product of much examination and thought; and on more occasions than one, have given and repeated such advice, as, in some things, hath proved extremely serviceable; and would have been so in more, had it been sooner and better followed.

Besides your vestry, there are several meetings of other persons for parish business, vulgarly called by the same name, because they have been usually held in the same place. And of these also I can assure you, with great truth, that such as I have been entitled to attend, are carried on with perfect fidelity, and no small vigilance. The affairs transacted in them are, the disposal of the money collected yearly from house to house on the king's letter; the direction of that excellent institution, your school of charity-girls; and the distribution of the money given at the sacrament; part of which is employed in buying coals, and coats and gowns for indigent persons, in the winter season; part in clothing, teaching and putting apprentices, forty boys of the parish; part in relieving, by the joint approbation of the rector and church-wardens, who meet for that end, such other objects of compassion, as apply to them; and of all the disbursements before-mentioned, as exact an account, as well can be, is kept. Thus far, therefore, I can answer for it, that you are served faithfully; whatever prudential improvements longer experience
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and better judgment may be able to make, as they have already made some.

And in officers, whose proceedings have not usually fallen within my immediate knowledge, I have had very little ground to suspect wilful or gross corruption or negligence; and often the utmost reason to be assured of exemplary uprightness and assiduity. Still the burthen of your poor is both a heavy one, as I fear it is in most old parishes, and a growing one, as I fear it is in all, old or new. That it cannot be lessened, I would on no account venture to say. On the contrary, I would earnestly exhort, here in public, those of you who are now, or hereafter shall be overseers, as I have often done your predecessors in private, and, I hope, not quite in vain, to procure all the information, and take all the pains, that your other engagements will permit, for that purpose; to be very tender indeed to the needy, where there is cause; but not to be moved by false good-nature of your own, by groundless importunities of theirs, or unreasonable recommendations of other persons, to bestow on any, especially the undeserving, more than is really necessary. I would further exhort you, with the same intent, to discountenance, as much as you possibly can, idleness, intemperance and debauchery, which are the main causes of indigence; and use your utmost influence, to make the attendance on divine worship and instruction, at the infirmary, universal, constant and beneficial; to study unanimity and mutual assistance, and *let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory**: to despise little advantages and self-indulgences, which, though they may be but a trifling foundation for complaint, frequently occasion a great deal; and, together with doing what good you can, labour to keep *your good* from being *evil spoken of*†; particularly by a readiness to give satisfaction on any article of your conduct, to every fair inquirer who is concerned to ask it; endeavouring, according to the apostle's rule, *that no man should blame you in this abundance, which is administered by you, and providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but in the sight of men*‡. For thus you will discharge your own consciences, and prevent at once needless expence and uncharitable re-

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3 Z

flexions;

* Phil. ii. 3.

† Rom. xiv. 16.

‡ 2 Cor. viii. 20, 21.

flexions ; you will gain esteem to yourselves, and to the office that you serve ; make it both easy, and in some measure necessary, to your successors, to act rightly too ; and so perhaps will long reap your share of profit, as well as credit, from what you have done.

But then I must at the same time, with equal earnestness, beg those, who do not serve such offices, to consider, with equity, the case of such as do. Reflect a little first, how tedious and irksome an employment it is, to go about collecting rates at thousands of doors. Should not you think it very hard, to have this work doubled and trebled upon you, by being needlessly sent away, and obliged to come again several times over ? Reflect also, how disagreeable it must be, to distribute this collection weekly, daily, hourly almost, amongst fourteen or fifteen hundred miserable wretches ; to hear and see the distresses of them all ; to guard against the frauds, bear the noisomeness, undergo the ill-language of too many of them. Would you imagine, that by doing all this, and receiving nothing for it, you had deserved to be spoken of as the worst of men ? But you will say, there are grievous abuses. And it is impossible to answer for every case or every person, through a course of years. But on the whole, I verily believe, there is little or no designed abuse ; and of indiscreet management less than is apprehended. But were there as much, consider again ; persons of higher rank disdain to undertake so mean an office, as that of overseers. Tradesmen therefore must ; who, from their education, cannot always have the most extended, or the clearest views of things ; who have their own business to fill up most of their time, which must be minded, else they are undone ; who come unexperienced into this difficult employment, and do not continue in it long enough to acquire experience sufficient ; are backward perhaps, as we most of us are, to take directions from others ; are often divided in opinion amongst themselves ; and by the time that they can agree what is right, find or think too much of their year gone, to set about the execution of it ; who, besides all this, are too commonly driven to do what they would not, by the solicitations of their neighbours, and even of their superiors, on whom they depend ; nay, sometimes they are traduced and vilified for aiming to be more frugal than those
that

that went before them. Surely to persons in these circumstances great allowances ought to be made; and that in prudence, as well equity. Despair of pleasing you will tempt them to be careless what they do; whereas, if you manifest a disposition to be satisfied with them, and thankful to them, so far as you have cause, you will excite them to deserve still better of you; especially, if, along with this, they were but more constantly and regularly inspected, assisted and supported by the justices of the peace; to whom therefore I beg leave here to recommend this good work, as I have done elsewhere, more than once. And I do it at present with the greater hope of success, because I know several of them are desirous of undertaking it; and am persuaded, that nothing but want of concert, and putting the matter in a due method, prevents it.

I have dwelt somewhat longer on the affairs of your poor, because they have produced uneasinesses among you, not only against one another, but against your minister; though he hath no more concern in them, than to pay his proportion towards this, as well as other common burthens; excepting his general duty, of exhorting all under his care to do theirs. And I hope you must see, that this exhortation of mine, which I have often thought of giving you before now, hath no other motive than a most hearty desire, that, to speak in the words immediately after the text, you may *be of one mind, and live in peace, and the God of love and peace be with you.* Let me now mention another thing of a more ecclesiastical nature. This building, in which we are, greatly wants both cleaning and beautifying, as is too visible, and repairing also; which the law, that founded the parish, requires to be done by a rate levied on the inhabitants. Lesser repairs have been made, without a rate, for many years past, out of the incomes arising from pews and burials. But that from the latter is greatly diminished; and both together cannot near do what is wanted. And yet taking the method, which, after all, must be taken, and the sooner the better, hath been delayed for fear of clamour. Let me beseech you therefore, to remove these apprehensions of your officers beforehand, as far as you can, by proper assurances that you understand the case rightly; and when the work is undertaken, to contribute your allotted shares with cheerfulness. I would not urge you to such low

considerations, as that of not coming behind other parishes in this respect, whom you excel so vastly in wealth and rank. It is much fitter to remind you of the distinguished honour, due by reason, scripture, and the consent of mankind, to sacred things; and of the duty and wisdom of not furnishing a pretence, either to unbelievers, or Papists, for triumphing over Christianity, or Protestantism; as not requiring, or not being able to obtain, from its professors, any degree of that decency in their churches, which even the middle sort of them would not bear to be wanting in their dwelling-houses. Indeed every thing public, though of a civil nature only, and yet more of a religious, ought far to exceed, in point of dignity, what is for mere private use. And the neglect of that rule both shews, and will increase, a prevalence of personal interests to those of the community. We read, that many among the children of *Israel*, both men and women, brought voluntary *offerings unto the Lord*, for the work of the tabernacle*. The early Christians imitated their example, as soon as they durst; and after the superfluous ornaments of following ages were justly disapproved; valuable presents have been made in the reformed church of *England*, and in this very church, for the greater solemnity and beauty of divine service. Why would it not now be one fitting mark of regard to God, if persons of fortune and condition were to do the same thing? At least, will it not be a lamentable mark of disregard to him, if any murmur to do what the law enjoins them?

But I proceed to speak to you concerning your future minister. When I prepared this part of my discourse, I had not the least guess who it would be; nor have I added or altered one word since; nor am I sure that I know, even now; if I do, he is almost entirely a stranger to me, except by what he hath written, which is excellent. And therefore you must understand me to speak without any particular reference to the person, but only on a general consideration of the case. The spiritual and eternal good of multitudes of souls will depend, not a little, on their attention to his instructions; and that will depend very much on the opinion formed of him, and the reception given him, at first. For God's sake there-

fore,

* Exod. xxxv. 5, &c.

fore, let none of you set out with prepossessions against him of any kind. For in all likelihood they will wrong him; and assuredly they will do harm to you. But especially I beg, that whoever professes any respect for me, would shew it, by paying a peculiar respect to my successor. In whatsoever he excels me, as I sincerely wish he may in all things, acknowledge it freely, thank God for it, give him the encouragement of knowing it; and never let any one be so absurd as to imagine, that he shall perform either a right or an acceptable part to me, by detracting in the least from his merit. If in any thing he should seem to be inferior, probably a little time and use may change your minds; you may be reconciled to, and perhaps by degrees prefer, what you disliked, when it was new to you. Or if not, remember the apostle's observation: *Every man hath his proper gift of God; one after this manner, another after that* *. He that is only second in such or such an attainment, may be first in a different one, of equal or greater benefit. And it is very unfair to judge of a man's character or usefulness, on the whole, by a single or a few articles. Besides, he will be able to adapt both his discourses and his behaviour to you much better after a time, than is possible while he is yet unacquainted with you; and to undertake more for your service, after some space for preparation, than just at present; which you may recollect was my own case. Therefore do not expect too much from him, nor be too easy of belief against him, in the beginning. And afterwards both consider and inquire, what is reasonable to expect, and what not, before you find fault.

The bodies and the voices of men, you well know, are not equally strong; and one may exert himself without danger to a degree which another, though seemingly as well qualified by nature, must not attempt. Now, *where there is a willing mind, it is accepted* by Heaven, and should be by you, *according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not* †. And though persons be able, yet such things as are not enjoined, and have not been customary, you have no right to demand or expect from them. Permit me to mention a few of these. The Sunday evenings lecture on the catechism

* 1 Cor. vii. 7.

† 2 Cor. viii. 12.

techism had its rise but twelve years ago : and there is none then, and scarce any on week-days, in the neighbouring parishes. Sermons occasionally by your minister at the chapels, in the afternoon, are not above five years older than that. The salary for the reading of early and late prayers at this church was paid at first by voluntary subscriptions, afterwards out of the offertory money, but now, for the last twenty years, by the rector ; and I believe no such thing is done by any rector elsewhere in the nation. The distribution of religious tracts, at his cost, to the parishioners, particularly to those who are instructed for confirmation, is yet of later date. And therefore, if your succeeding minister omits these things, you are not to blame him ; if he continues any of them, you are to thank him.

Another point, a-kin to the last, in which I must entreat you to be reasonable with him, is the expectation of charity from him. I have all along had other considerable preferment together with this. I have had sums of money, several times of late years, and this last a very great one, entrusted to my disposal. The case of my successor may be extremely different : and both the high and the low among you should allow for the difference. It is become very usual with many of you to recommend, when requested, any poor person whom you know, I am sorry to add, and more than a few, whom you do not know, to the rector for relief ; being deceived, perhaps, by stories of pretended legacies or gifts, put into his hands for that purpose : and then he must either run a risk of disobliging you, by rejecting your recommendations, or be overburdened with the expence which they bring on him, or at least every hour almost of his time will be broken, and filled up with hearing and examining distresses and characters. This last inconvenience, I assure you, hath grown upon me in such a manner, that I do not know how I could have continued to go through it. Therefore, when poor persons apply to you, remember you ought to relieve them yourselves, if you are able ; and if you are unable, you should consider, that more objects than enough will come of course to the knowledge of your minister, without adding to them thus. We of the clergy should undoubtedly be ready, both to give our own alms plentifully, and to assist others in giving theirs ;
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but still, as even the apostles pleaded, *it is not reason, that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables* *.

Another thing, which I must take the liberty of asking for my successor, is your bounty. I again return you my thanks for that which you have exercised towards me. But indulge me, at the same time, a few words on the subject. There are indeed legal dues, belonging to the rectory, so considerable, that were they all paid, and nothing more added, probably the income would be greater than it now is. But they are so far from being all paid, that in the principal article, Easter offerings, though expressly required by the act of parliament, which founded the parish, I believe two thousand families, out of three, pay nothing. Such as are known to be poor, are never asked. Such as only say they are poor, though that plea would neither be allowed them, nor made by them, in any other case, are never asked again. And such as refuse, without condescending to allege any reason, have not, in my time, been either compelled, or, to my knowledge, threatened or solicited. Yet surely it may be said, without offence, by one who hath now no interest depending, that in such matters, as well as others, conscience binds all men, both to pay what they know is due, and to make a fair inquiry, whether what is demanded be not due. If they, that will do neither, were forced, they would have no cause to complain. But the more your minister loses by his aversion to harsh methods, the more he is entitled to your voluntary kindness. This alone is what makes his income large: and were it yet larger than it is, as perhaps you think it, permit me to say, he that doth the work, deserves the wages; out of which no small deductions will be made by calls upon him of various kinds. The utmost that almost any of you give, bears, I conceive, no very high proportion to several of your annual expences on other persons and purposes, of less importance, to say no worse. And diminishing your generosity must be, in some measure, to the most disinterested man, not only an undeserved mortification, but a discouragement of his zeal to serve you. On every account, therefore, obey the scripture rule,
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which, take notice, is general : *Let him that is taught in the word, communicate unto him that teacheth, in all good things* *.

But a far more valuable mark of your regard to your minister, and, I dare say, beyond comparison a more agreeable one to him, will be your attendance on him here. I see no cause to doubt, but you will have every inducement to this that you ever have had ; and you will assuredly have the strongest which you can have, that assembling yourselves for worship and instruction is the ordinance of Christ, from which you may expect such a blessing on your hearts and lives, as you cannot expect without it. And I have taught you all this while to very little effect, if you have not yet learnt, that *neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase* †. If you have *mens persons in admiration* ‡, and come only to hear this or that preacher, however you are pleased, however you are moved, no real and lasting good will be at all likely to follow : and if you come to hear the gospel, *not as the word of men*, but as *the word of God* §, let who will dispense it, you will receive benefit.

This place, indeed, doth not afford room for all the inhabitants : but the room which it doth afford, is most equitably allotted to such as made the earliest application for it ; and they, who cannot as yet be accommodated here, may, without difficulty, at the two chapels. No one, therefore, needs omit divine service ; especially, as you have prayers four times every day at the church, twice every day at the chapels, and sermons twice every Lord's day at both. You have also had, for a considerable part of the year, a lecture on the catechism, equivalent to a sermon, both on the evening of that day, and the morning of another, the latter of which at least you will probably continue to have. And surely you may prevail on yourselves, if need be, to alter your usual hour of eating or visiting, once or twice a-week, in order to come the oftener, and adore your Maker ; to hear his word, and give your servants time to do the same thing. Nay, why may not many of you so regulate your affairs, as to frequent daily prayers in the church ? Few of you, I fear, have them

* Gal. vi. 6. † 1 Cor. iii. 7. ‡ Jude, ver. 16. § 1 Thess. ii. 13.

them in your families : *I speak this to your shame**. Nor must I fail to remind you, as you know I have done, of that highly useful, and by no means terrible or difficult duty, of receiving the Lord's supper ; enjoined all Christians, and yet absolutely slighted by most. But observe, at the same time, that private prayer and meditation, suited to your inward state, is a duty full as important as public prayer, or hearing sermons, or partaking of the table of the Lord ; and the latter, without the former, will be of small efficacy. You may, if you will, despise either or both : and they are commonly despised, to a degree not known in any other Christian country, nor in this before the present age : but the world is not the better for it ; nor will you. Your virtue will become insecure, and grievously imperfect ; your sense of piety will wither away ; your hopes of futurity will grow faint ; your fears of it, when you reflect, will strengthen, till you will be glad to throw off both together, if you can, and live and die like the beasts that perish. Others will learn, and in part from you, to think and act in the same manner ; every one's profit, pleasure, anger or caprice, will be the only rule of his conduct ; and what security of any single enjoyment of life can there be, in such a state of things ?

But then, alas ! going through every exercise of devotion, both here and at home, merely to do our share towards keeping society in good order, is policy, not religion ; and going through them for the sake of the outward act, without care to improve by them, is superstition ; mistaking the means for the end. *The grace of God that bringeth salvation, hath appeared unto all men, not to fix their expectations of future happiness on forms of any sort, but to teach them, that denying godliness and worldly lusts, they should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works*†. These are the fundamental doctrines of Christianity : and I appeal to your consciences, whether they are not also the doctrines which I have perpe-

* 1 Cor. vi. 5. xv. 34.

† Tit. ii. 11,—14.

tually inculcated upon you, though with mixtures, no doubt too frequent, of human infirmity and error. Yet notwithstanding these, I trust, through God's mercy, I can safely say with *St. Paul*, *Ye know, from the first day that I came among you, how I have kept back nothing that was profitable to you, but have shewed and taught you ; testifying repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.* And could I say also, that I had done this, in a proper degree, *from house to house*, as well as *publicly*, then I might, with him too, *take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men* *. But, though I hope I have never been backward to embrace opportunities of this sort, when offered me, yet that I have not more diligently sought them, and laboured to introduce more serious discourse into my ordinary visits to you, I am sensible is a fault, which neither the uncommonness of such conversation, nor the fear of disgusting persons by it, are sufficient to excuse. Allow me, therefore, to make you such amends as I can, for this and all my defects, by admonishing you solemnly now, and leaving it on your hearts, that religion is the greatest and most important of truths ; that the business of this transitory life, compared with which, profits, pleasures, honours, acquisitions of all sorts, are trifles and follies, is the preparing for an endless one to come ; that the true preparation consists in active love to God, and man, and virtue ; that such love can never be duly excited or maintained within us, but by the methods which Heaven hath directed ; and that these are, a deep conviction of our guilt and weakness ; an earnest and daily application to our heavenly Father, in faith of the merits of his crucified Son, for the pardon of our transgressions, and the sanctifying influences of his Holy Spirit ; a constant attentive use of those ordinances, by which he hath appointed both to be conveyed ; a conscientious watchful care of governing our actions, words and thoughts, not by the dictates of inclination or fashion, but the precepts of reason and scripture. If I have taught any of you these things effectually, God's name be praised : teach them your children, your servants, your friends ; for neglecting their instruction is partaking in their sins. If I have not, for his
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* Acts xx. 18, 20, 21, 26.

fake, and that of your souls, learn them now; else *I have preached, and you have believed, in vain**; and woe will be to me, or you, or both of us, at the great day.

You have peculiar cause to *take heed how ye hear*†. Persons of high rank every where, and this parish hath many such, are concerned, beyond others, to be *patterns of good works*‡; and are too commonly, beyond others, patterns of bad ones. Both they, and the middle part of you, live amongst innumerable incitements to unlawful gratifications, unfit expences, and waste of precious time, even the most precious of all, that of this day, in idle pernicious amusements. And the contagion of this over-grown wicked city tempts the lowest part of you, most dangerously, to all sorts of crimes. Think then, how carefully you ought to preserve yourselves and yours, by the antidote of God's word and worship, from so destructive and deceitful poisons.

Great numbers of you have attended here very assiduously: you must have felt something stirred within you, that hath induced you to it: the hopes of your salvation depend on the fruit which that shall bring forth; and surely then you will not let it be blasted, and die away. To many of you I have spoken many years; to some as long as you can remember: what benefit have you received? Barely receiving pleasure is nothing. It will rather aggravate your condemnation, if what hath affected you hath not influenced you. Are you then become real, practical, inward, uniform Christians? If not, you are now going to have another teacher; mind what you are taught in another manner, or you are undone for ever. *But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak*§.

Yet still, supposing you are truly religious, a further exceedingly material question is, To what degree in religion are you arrived? Is it a confirmed, lively, increasing one, or faint and tottering? Unless you gain ground, you will lose it; if you are negligent, you will fall; and if you imagine yourselves as pious and virtuous as you need be, you are almost as far from it as you can be. Search then diligently, strengthen what is weak, and add what is deficient, *that ye may be*

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* 1 Cor. xv. 2.

† Luke viii. 18.

‡ Tit. ii. 7.

§ Heb. vi. 9.

perfect and entire, wanting nothing *. Whatever due instruction I may have omitted to give you, it ought to have been, and is, your concern to supply it to yourselves; and if I have in any measure performed that duty as I ought, remember, improvement will be expected from you, in proportion to the advantages which you have enjoyed. Through God's mercy, some of you, that were bad, I have cause to think are become good; and some, that were good, become better: but alas, how few are these, amongst the thousands of whom this parish consists! O may there prove to be many more than are come to my knowledge! Else I *must give account* of the success of my ministry *with grief* †: for the largest and best part of it hath been employed on you: and fain, therefore, would I persuade myself, that it will be found to have produced a tolerable share of good effect. *For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? are not even ye, in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, at his coming* ‡? But however I have failed hitherto, let me not, I beseech you, fail now to obtain, that if ever I have said any thing to you, which raised any one Christian purpose or desire in your hearts, you would at length set yourselves to recollect and accomplish it; and that if you have experienced nothing of this kind from my preaching, you would the more conscientiously open your breasts to the impressions of that which you will attend next: for glad shall I be to have promoted your spiritual welfare, be it only by this final request; and to learn, that the seed which shall be sown from henceforward, yields, beyond comparison, a more plentiful harvest than that which preceded. For *God is my record*, if I may presume to adopt the apostle's words, *how greatly I long after you all, in the bowels of Jesus Christ: and this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in judgment, that ye may approve the things that are excellent, that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of the Lord, being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God* §. Let then your conversation be as becometh the gospel; that whether I come and see you, or be absent, I may bear

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* James i. 4. † Heb. xiii. 17. ‡ 1 Thess. ii. 19. § Phil. i. 8.—11.

*of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind**; not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, working out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do†.

Understand me not to mean taking an absolute and final leave of you. *As long as I live in this tabernacle, to speak the language of St. Peter, I shall think it meet, if desired and able, to stir you up, by putting you in remembrance †. But this is the last time I shall stand here in that peculiar relation to you which I have borne so long. And now, therefore, brethren, to conclude with pronouncing over you the solemn farewell of St. Paul, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified §. There may we meet again, never to part more!*

* Phil. i. 27. † Phil. ii. 12, 13. ‡ 2 Pet. i. 13. § Acts xx. 32.

S E R M O N CXXXV.

(Preached before the Governors of the *London* Hospital, or Infirmary, for the Relief of Sick and Diseased Persons, especially Manufacturers, and Seamen in Merchants Service, &c. at the Parish-Church of St. *Lawrence-Jewry*, on *Wednesday, February 20. 1754.*

SIMPLICITY MINGLED WITH LIBERALITY, ACTIVITY WITH GOVERNING, AND CHEERFULNESS WITH MERCY, STRIKING MARKS OF THE CHRISTIAN SPIRIT.

ROM. xii. 8.

—*He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.*

OF all the benevolent feelings which God hath planted in our nature, compassion is the most valuable: for it prompts us the most directly to relieve the miserable, whose distresses are much greater than the enjoyments of the happy can be here below; and yet, without the call of this tender sympathy, we should, far oftener than we do, turn our eyes from them, and leave them to their fate. Persons of all ranks are frequently in circumstances that demand pity: but the higher part of the world have it more in their power to avoid sufferings than the lowest; and it is easier to assist the latter effectually. Their poverty alone, indeed, if they are well able to provide themselves necessaries, wants no assistance. It is one requisite state in the scale of things, appointed by the wisdom of Providence; and allows them a very comfortable enjoyment

enjoyment of life. But if work be scarce, or their families large, they may be grievously straitened, even in health ; and in their sickness, their condition, though single, is lamentable ; and, when married, often extremely so. If only a child be sick, they have seldom leisure to attend it duly, but if the parents are sick, all the children must be neglected ; and the labour, which used to maintain them, cease. They are destitute, both of knowledge what to do, and of money to procure directions and medicines, nay, perhaps, proper food. They follow, at random, the suggestions of neighbours, no wiser than themselves ; or, after languishing long, and growing worse than they needed, have recourse for cure, often to ignorant, often to rapacious creatures ; who, if thy chance to recover, yet strip them of all, and load them with debts, that disquiet the rest of their days ; and too commonly drive them to destructive cordials, which unhappily the most needy can afford ; or desperate acts of injustice to others, or violence to their own persons.

Religion, humanity, common prudence, loudly require us to rescue them from such dreadful evils. For they are our brethren, and God hath committed them to our care ; we owe to their industry all that we enjoy ; and without their aid, should be far more helpless than they. It is true, many of them fall into diseases and want through their own faults ; and bounty to them may encourage those faults. But many also, with the utmost diligence and parsimony, can but just live. Now surely such ought to have the comfort of knowing, that in all events they shall be secured from extremities. And even could we distinguish the blameable from the rest, we should make allowances to them, for ignorance, frailty, temptation ; as we hope God and Man will do to us, who have less excuse. While they are well, indeed, it will be right to let them fare more hardly ; but neglecting them, when they are ill, is exposing them to perish, is next to murdering them. Their distemper, it must be owned, is from God's hand ; but he commands us, both by nature and scripture, to alleviate it, if we can ; and doubtful consequences afford no plea to the contrary. How do we know, that mercy, exercised prudently, will not reclaim them ; or that refusing it will prove a warning to them, or to others ?

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If then the sick poor ought to have relief, what is the best manner of giving it? Barely supplying them with food, is doing little or nothing towards their cure; and every days continuance of their sickness, that can be prevented, is just so much unnecessary addition of wretchedness to themselves, and of damage to the public. If we furnish them with money also, they will often misapply it. If we procure them advice and medicines; dispersed, unprovided, and unteachable as they are, the charge will usually be heavy, and the success very uncertain. Therefore parochial infirmaries have been erected, where they could; and may be of considerable use, but far inferior to larger hospitals. They are much more liable to the bad influence of private interest and partiality: Governors, practitioners, attendants, will seldom be near so well qualified; and the cost of each patient, will be vastly greater. Public hospitals then, are evidently the most desirable. There, cheats will never apply: proper objects may have what is needful, as soon as ever they are indisposed: If able, may go on with their business; if not, may be taken into the house. Thus, in both cases, they partake of the united skill of learned persons, almost as largely as the highest of their betters. And, in the latter case, their families are disburdened of them; their lodgings are much quieter and wholesomer, than their own can easily be; their physic is duly given, their diet and whole regimen suited to their condition; and the symptoms and turns of their disease watched over, and reported, by experienced nurses. Then further, the art of healing is improved in these places beyond all others: not, as the vulgar sometimes fancy, by rash trials of dangerous experiments; but by frequent occasions for able professors to consult, and ingenious candidates to learn from them, to the common advantage of all ranks of men.

But, though public infirmaries are in general highly useful; and have accordingly been set up in many parts of this nation lately; and in none, I believe, laid down again, or disliked: yet they are the most useful in the most populous cities. For to these, helpless wretches need not be sent from a distance, but are always at hand in them: they contain many poor strangers, that come occasionally; many sojourners, that have no legal settlements. And besides, even such as have, are less
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known to the rich, and less minded, amidst their hurry of business or pleasure, than in villages or smaller towns. Now multitudes of these, are continually falling sick, and receiving hurts, and, if left to themselves in their miserable cellars and garrets, must suffer beyond conception, and most of them die. As therefore this is, to speak moderately, one of the largest of cities, and the busiest also, which increases accidents, hospitals are peculiarly necessary for it.

Some may think there were enough before the erection of ours. But the contrary is manifest: for the others are not emptier since. And though, instead of six beds, with which it began thirteen years ago, it hath now one hundred and thirty-five, which have been filled near nine times each, during the last year; yet a large proportion of pitiable objects, brought in or recommended, have been rejected for want of room: how cutting a disappointment to them, you may, by supposing their misfortunes your own, in some low degree imagine. Of out patients, there have been nine thousand four hundred, within the same time; and were, on the first of *January* last, sixteen hundred on the books; which great resort, a remarkable distinction of our hospital from all others, proves the necessity of it, particularly in that quarter; and, at the same time, the good success of the remedies administered in it. But still that success would be vastly augmented, if more could be taken in; because from a distance many cannot come at all for advice; and few will come for it so often, or follow it so strictly, as they should: nor will they be either dieted or nursed at home near so well.

It may seem an objection to the enlargement of hospitals, that the inhabitants within the bills of mortality are lessening. But alas, their diseases and distresses are increasing at the same time. Intemperance, especially in spirituous liquors, and debauchery, destroy their health and fruitfulness: Love of pleasures and amusements, makes them idle and necessitous; and contempt of religion, leaves bad inclinations unrestrained. Were we wise, the utmost zeal would be shown to stop this torrent of folly and sin, by the authority, and above all by the example, of superiors: which, especially when it is bad, the next beneath them will imitate; and so downwards, to the lowest of all. For it is a strange defect in policy, not to think

of preventing persons from making themselves useless and wretched, but only of restoring them to a condition of doing it again. But unless the former be vigorously attempted by well advised methods, of which God grant us better hope, there will be a growing demand for hospitals, till the number of our people is reduced yet further.

Still it may be alleged, that the burden of supporting them, instead of resting, as it doth on a few, should be laid on the community by a law. But the poor cannot make this law; nor doth it appear that the rich will: not to say, that if it were made, the charitable would lose one principal method of satisfying their own minds, as well as others, that they are truly such. And besides, how are we sure that the care would be so effectual, and the charge, indeed our own share of it, less, or so little, under the management of legal officers, *taking the oversight by constraint, or for lucre*, as of those who take it *willingly, and of a ready mind**? However, at present, hospitals must depend on voluntary gifts, as they have done in time past.

Not that this excellent institution began early in the world: which may seem very strange. But possibly distempers were formerly fewer. And certainly, among the ancient heathens, tenderness of heart towards the wretched was no common virtue †. Nor did it among the *Jews* extend far; though *Moses* enjoins it towards all men, repeatedly and pathetically ‡. But our blessed Saviour, the singular good-nature of whose doctrine is one strong evidence of its divine original, besides teaching more efficaciously, than had ever been done before, the obligation of mutual love in general, bath particularly

* 1 Pet. v. 2.

† The direction and practice of *Cato* the Censor was, to sell slaves, when they became diseased, or otherwise unfit for labour. *Cato de Re Rustica*, *Plut. in Cat.* And *Suetonius* saith, that in the reign of *Claudius*, (when the *Romans* were polished in the highest degree, and philosophy had tried its utmost influence upon them) some exposed their sick slaves to perish in the isle of *Æsculapius* at *Rome*: on which account the emperor ordered, that exposing them, should be deemed giving them their liberty, if they recovered; and that, if any chose rather to put them to death, it should be punished, as murder. *Suet. in Claud. c. 25.*

‡ Exod. xxii. 21. xxiii. 9, 12. Lev. xix. 33, 34. xxv. 25, 37, 37. Deut. x. 19. xxiv. 14, 15, 17.—22. xxvii. 19.

larly inforced mercy to the sick, by his miracles of healing, by his parable of the good *Samaritan* *, by his affecting description of his own future behaviour at the great day of judgement†. In consequence of this, we find the primitive Christians, the most benevolent of men ‡: and the affection of their successors to each other, a subject of general wonder §. We find those of *Rome*, who were the richest, sending alms to their brethren throughout the earth||: and those of *Alexandria* and *Carthage*, in the desolations of a dreadful plague, ministering to the infected, with astonishing courage, while the heathens gave proofs of the most shocking neglect and barbarity ¶. Nay, those of the whole eastern empire, just after the several cities of it had been persecuting them, in the reign of *Maximin*, were the only persons, who assisted others in the double distress of pestilence and famine; attending on the dying, burying the dead, feeding the hungry, without distinction; which they did continually, with such tenderness and bounty in every respect, that they and their God were publicly celebrated and honoured for it by all men **. Nor do Christian writers alone ascribe to them this character. The profane *Lucian* acknowledges and ridicules their plentiful almsgiving ††. The apostate emperor *Julian* confesses, that the worshippers of his gods, disregarded their own poor, and the Christians maintained those of both professions. He gives exhortations to the former, and undeniably taken out of the New Testament, to amend, and imitate the *Galileans* in this and many other points. But, distrusting their effect, he had begun to appropriate large revenues to the support of the credit of paganism, against the influences of the charity of Christians ‡‡. Nor were

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these

* Luke x 30---37.

† Matth. xxv. 31---46.

‡ Acts ii. 44. 45. iv. 32---37.—xi. 27---30. xxiv. 17. Rom. xv. 25. 2 Cor. viii. 1---4. ix. 1, 2. Col. i. 4. 1 Thess. iv. 9. 2 Thess. i. 3. 1 Tim. v. 10. Philem. verse 7. Rev. ii. 19. Clem. Rom. Eph. i. § 1, 2, 55.

§ Tert. Apol. c. 39, 42.

|| Dionys. ap. Euseb. H. E. l. 4. c. 23. & l. 7. c. 5.

¶ Dionys. ap. Euseb. H. E. l. 7. c. 22. Cypr. Vit. per Pontium, p. 5.

** Euseb. H. E. l. 9. c. 8.

†† De Morte Peregrini, p. 996, 997, 998. Ed Bourdelot. Par. 1615.

‡‡ Julian. Fragm. Ep. p. 290, 305. Ep. 49. p. 429. &c. Ed. Spanh. Lips. 1696. Greg. Nazianz. Orat. 3. p. 101, 102. Ed. Billi. Par. 1630. Sozomen. Hist. Eccl. l. 5. c. 16.

these bountiful only to make and preserve converts : for they continued so after their faith became the reigning one*. Then, for it was impracticable before, a vast variety of beneficent foundations, and, amongst them, hospitals for the sick, things unknown to preceeding ages †, rose from the private liberalities of believers ‡, and were authorised and regulated by the civil power §, which have spread wherever the gospel hath spread : and make one principal glory of our own church, our own times, and the reign of our gracious sovereign. These facts, I hope, will recommend, not only charity to Christians, but Christianity to charitable persons : and shew the wisdom of learning from scripture, the proper directions for carrying on the good work, which we are met to countenance.

Now there can be no better directions, than those of the text. For it comprehends the three necessary points : a due provision, a vigilant superintendence, a willing execution.

I. A due provision. *He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity* : fairly allowing every right motive its full effect upon him. The mere instinct of pity will operate irregularly, and sometimes hurtfully. Mere worldly prudence will be generally misled by present self-interest. A sense of moral fitness, without the sanction of divine authority, will scarce ever produce much fruit, in common soils at least. And the religion of reason alone, will but seldom furnish precepts determinate enough, or excite hopes and fears powerful enough, to supply the deficiency. Doubtless we Christians ought sincerely to esteem those, who from any true principle, benefit their fellow-creatures : but at the same time, earnestly to pray God, that he would make them *altogether such as we are* ||.

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* Chrysost. Hom. 66. in Matth. p. 658. Tom. 7. Ed. Montf.

† The word *Valetudinarium* is in several Roman authors ; but seems to mean only a receptacle for the sick servants of a family, in or near the house.

‡ Jerom saith, that *Fabiola*, a wealthy Christian widow, of a noble Roman family, who died in his time, first erected a public infirmary ; *prima omnium vocationum instituit, in quo agrotantes colligeret de plateis & consumpta languoribus atque inedia miserorum membra foveret*. Ep. 84. Ed. Bened. 77. Ed. Veron. And Gregory the Presbyter, in his life of Nazianzen, saith, that *Basil*, who lived in the same age with Jerom, built a large hospital for lepers, with charity money, which he collected for that purpose.

§ Cod. l. i. tit. 2. leg. 15, 19, 22. tit. 3. leg. 18.

|| Acts xxvi. 29.

The gospel weakens no other inducement: and adds such persuasive ones of its own, that whoever embraces it *in simplicity and godly sincerity* *, must be charitable. And hence I presume it is, that the word, translated *simplicity* in the text, signifies liberality, in several places of the New Testament †, and perhaps in no book written before it. For one, who is a Christian *in singleness of heart* ‡, can neither covet immoderate wealth, nor hoard up against improbable accidents, nor make false pleas of inability, nor examine the merits of the distressed with rigour §, nor confine his alms to some favourite objects of beneficence; but will fairly consider the claims of every different sort. And none hath better, than this hospital, on various accounts.

It stands remote from others, in the neighbourhood of innumerable mariners and artificers, whom their manner of life subjects to many grievous casualties and diseases. Of these it takes care, if the case so require, (and there have been three hundred and thirty such during the last year,) without any recommendation; but in all cases, without any payment on their admission, or any security for their burial, should they die: which two demands, exclude the most helpless from other hospitals, and throw them on ours: but the advantage increases far beyond the expence.

Its support hath always been from spontaneous gifts; and, within the compass of the annual account lately published, they have fallen short of the disbursements by three hundred and fifty pounds. Now it could not subsist, much less be enlarged as it ought, were this diminution to continue. But, we trust it is only temporary; proceeding from zeal to carry on with speed a separate, but important part of the general design. A new structure, discreetly postponed at first, is now erecting, in a purer air, with larger and loftier rooms, yet wholly contrived for health, not show, in which far greater numbers will be far better accommodated. And, indeed, the erection of it is a double charity, by employing the healthy
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* 2 Cor. i. 12.

† 2 Cor. viii. 2. ix. 11, 13. Jam. i. 5.

‡ Acts ii. 46. Eph. vi. 5. Col. iii. 22.

§ *Le Clerc* apprehends, that the apostle meant particularly to give this direction; which some of the early Christians carried to a great length. See *the Shepherd of Hermas*, l. 2. mand. 2.

poor, as well as providing for the unhealthy. On this, near eighteen hundred pounds have been laid out, in the last twelve-month, more than hath been received in that time ; and only two hundred and ninety-three remain in Bank. The friends to it, therefore, I hope, will not fail to consider, that the sooner it is finished, the sooner the money already expended on it, will become useful, and the charge of having two houses at once will cease. And such, as were not friends to it, ought to consider also, that, while others are contributing to the building, the fund for the patients will sink, unless they supply the deficiency. When it is once completed, though larger donations will be wanted, than before it was begun, because more persons will be admitted than can now, yet, as the whole will be directly applied to their use, the benefit of the hospital, in proportion to the cost, will be much more visible, than it hath been hitherto.

II. The second point is, a vigilant superintendence, *He that ruleth, with diligence.*

Some of the governors, indeed, cannot be expected to attend, unless on occasions very extraordinary. The mere honour of their names in the list of subscribers will do great service ; and their occasional recommendations and vindications of the charity, yet greater. But the assistance of able and experienced persons, as visitors, (an office to be faithfully discharged, when undertaken) and of considerable persons also at the weekly and other boards, will be a meritorious addition to their contributions : and the more, as only the desire of doing good, can render it agreeable to them. This will satisfy the world, that every thing goes on well. For good government is what distributes properly the nourishment that benefactions furnish, and animates the whole machine ; of which, care or neglect will wonderfully augment or frustrate the use. In a system compounded of so many parts, precaution to obviate disorders, or interposition to rectify them, must be continual. And where no positive faults appear, admirable improvements may be invented, or imported from other places. Indeed proposals for that end, should not be rashly made, but very candidly considered, when they are made, and yet not overwarmly pressed. For, if they are right, in time they will prevail. And eager contentions are solicitously to be avoided

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in all points, partialities of every sort to be laid aside ; the advantage of the house to be solely kept in view, and even that pursued with gentleness, and the most obliging mutual regards. But though dissention, like an acute distemper, threatens the most loudly, and brings on the suddenest danger ; yet, if the crisis be favourable, all may be as well or better than before : but languid supineness is a chronicle disease, that proceeds with slow and silent, but surer steps, towards a dissolution. The former happens ofteneft in the beginning of these undertakings ; and I hope you are completely got over it, the later in the progress ; of which therefore beware. Mark out and engage fit persons to join with you, and succeed you, as acting governors ; infuse the spirit of right management into them, and instruct them in the fundamental articles of it.

One article, of almost unspeakable moment, is cleanliness ; which you have lately consulted with much prudence, in providing change of fresh beds. But frequent renewal of fresh air, is found to be another indispensable requisite for the recovery, and even the preservation of health, especially when numbers are confined together in the same room. Yet few sufficiently know this : and attendants, to save themselves trouble, are unwilling to regard it ; and the change must be made, in the case of the sick, with no little caution. An excellent man *, who had long been an ornament to his profession as a Clergyman, and to his country as a philosopher, hath shewn the best means, as well as the necessity of making provision for this purpose ; and will gladly give minuter directions, which may be of considerable benefit in your present house, and of much greater in fitting up your new one.

But there is another article, on which I must beg leave to enlarge a little more : that of religious worship and instruction. Prayers are read on two week-days, but they should be read, and a sermon preached, on the Lord's-day also ; as, I believe, is done in every other hospital. The omission will be interpreted, if continued, a slight on Christianity, and cannot fail to grieve extremely all the pious part of the sick ; whereas, public devotions and exhortations then, will not only comfort these, but probably awaken many of the rest to the reverence
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* Dr. Stephen Hales.

of the day, which, being their only one of leisure, must be the best of their lives, or the worst *. But bare general forms have often small efficacy : and, therefore, a distinct personal application ought moreover to be made to each of them, not to fill their heads with empty words, or with idle, and much less with hurtful notions, but to excite in their souls a strong and practical sense, that he, from whom they are, and on whom they depend here and hereafter, hath sent from heaven to *teach them, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, they should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ : who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works* †.

These doctrines, proposed to them compassionately and discreetly, when their condition permits them to reflect without hazard, will give to the well-disposed inexpressible consolation, and to the worst no more than useful terror. A penitent conviction of their past sins will instantly render them humble, contented, orderly, and observant in all respects : it must, if they die, have some good influence on their future state, and may have the very best on many bystanders. But if they recover, as eight in nine do, fixing it deeply in their hearts will prompt them to every thing right for themselves, and all with whom they are concerned ; will restrain them from every thing wrong, and make them happy under all restraints and all afflictions, by the assurance of an eternal recompence, which inestimable effects nothing else can have. Possibly scarce any principles of Christianity or morality have ever been taught them ; for, in this land of abused liberty, that is determined by chance, or arbitrary choice : possibly none ever will, unless it be here ; and here they may be inculcated on them with peculiar advantage. They have leisure to think ; are kept cool and low ; have not their vicious companions round them to deride seriousness, but fellow-sufferers to applaud it : they experience the value of religion and virtue ; for to these they owe the tender care that is taken

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* On this admonition, the late Lord Viscount *Folkestone* gave privately an allowance for performing the *Sunday* service, till the hospital provided for it

† Tit. ii. 12, 13, 14.

ken of them. Pious books are read in the wards, by such as can, to the rest ; which will be much better minded, after separate exhortations made to each ; and a small gift of short admonitory tracts, judiciously chosen for them when they go away, will tend very powerfully, through God's blessing, to perpetuate the impressions which they have received : at least, we shall thus have tried what, even in worldly wisdom, we ought. A considerable share of the poverty and diseases, and some share of the accidents, that bring persons to hospitals, arises from their wickedness ; and therefore amending them is the way to prevent their return thither. Public wealth and strength consists partly in the numbers, partly in the usefulness of the people. Now both will bear a near proportion to their morals ; on which also the private security and domestic enjoyment of life almost entirely rests. And many of the poor wretches cured, if they go away as vile as they come, will have cause to wish, with their families and the community, that their distempers had proved mortal. Even supposing men could be kept sufficiently in order, against their judgments and wills, by dread of temporal punishments, their situation must be a very uneasy one ; whereas, thankful obedience to a just ruler, and gracious rewarder, is the most pleasing motive imaginable. But evidently they cannot ; nor any where so little, as where the limitation of the magistrate's authority by law is the strictest. And they must have a strangely self-denying zeal against religion, who had rather that those about them should despise it and be mischievous, than revere it and be harmless.

Indeed the performance of all that I have been recommending, will require some addition of expence ; but not much in comparison, not more than is allowed elsewhere, not without receiving a valuable consideration in return. Good persons will contribute to it ; will, if desired, bear the whole of it ; will be more liberal to the other parts of the charity for it ; the reputation of the house will be heightened by it ; which, I must tell you, suffers from delaying so necessary a provision.

I would only say further, on the second head, that when patients are discharged, the good advice of the board, and of the governors who recommended them, may have vast weight with them, especially if it be enforced by some assistance, ei-

ther from the common stock, or private liberality, for present support, till they get strength and business.

III. The third and last point is a willing execution. *He that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.* For *shewing mercy* is understood by the best commentators * to signify here, what the like phrase comprehends in the history of the benevolent Samaritan †, ministering personally to the objects of the charity; and *cheerfulness* ‡ denotes good will, both to them and to the employment. All depends at last on the care and kindness of those who are engaged in this immediate application; in which they must indeed see melancholy and shocking sights, and perform low and disgustful offices. But religion hath the secret to make every thing agreeable; and their occupations are so much more beneficial to mankind, and better fitted to improve their own hearts, than Providence hath allotted to most others, that they have cause on reflection to be satisfied, and even pleased, with their condition.

The general duty of all, who attend on this good work, is industriously to further, and in no respect to counteract the intent of it; to abstain from provoking, discouraging, profane or immodest behaviour and discourse; and to deter or dissuade; so far as they can, every one concerned, from whatever is faulty. The particular duty of him who ministers in holy things, hath been already intimated. Physicians and surgeons are habituated to humanity and decency; and will undoubtedly shew, and require that all under them shew, as much of it to these poor creatures as to their betters. The officers of the house must not only be upright, frugal, diligent, themselves, but see both that inferior servants be assiduous and punctual, faithful and impartial, gentle and tender, which I understand is expressly charged on them, and likewise that the patients conform to the rules prescribed them. Failures in the very lowest part of the management, and that seem but small, may be extremely hurtful to the sick; and, though they are not, will be mentioned by them in strong terms when they come out; and such reports will reach their recommenders

* ΕΛΙΩΤΗΣ; hic vocat, qui ægrotis aderant. GROT.

† Luke x. 37.

‡ Ιλαρότης hoc loco promptitudinem animi significat. GROT.

recommenders and others, and in all likelihood be aggravated, to the unknown disadvantage of the charity.

But the characters and conduct, both of the governors and of those whom they intrust, give such assurance, that all is and will be carried on well, that I proceed, in conclusion, boldly to ask your generous contributions to this excellent undertaking.

Most of the piteous objects, for whom it provides, become such in working for you. Long voyages, or dangerous enterprises, or employments liable to mischances, or labour on unwholesome materials, or earnest active industry, or close confinement and sedentary diligence, are the usual causes of their sufferings, and the principal sources of our national riches and grandeur, of the conveniencies, and elegancies, and enjoyments of life: so that indeed they are martyrs to the public service. And were it only to the public luxury, the fault would not be in them, but in you, their superiors, who dispose of them so; and who ought not surely to let them lie unrelieved in languishment or torture, for having furnished you the means of pomp and delicacy. If you do, you are sadly unworthy of the kind providence which hath exalted you above them, to be its own stewards for their welfare.

But they are more directly the servants of you merchants and traders; to whom they are instruments of earning wealth and honours, for a bare subsistence. Think then, what you should feel in their situation, were you neglected after all, when illness comes upon you. Think also, that industrious persons are more in number for every one such whose life is saved, or who is sooner or more perfectly restored to health. These considerations will clearly shew you, that all persons of eminence in trade should be liberal subscribers, and the rest occasional, if they cannot be stated, benefactors. The present is one occasion. The banker, or the box, or any friend of the hospital, will afford you other opportunities when you please. And you well know, that small sums frequently given, make a large total; besides that even the widow's mite singly is precious in the sight of God*.

4 C 2

Some,

* Mark xii. 41,—44.

Some, of various ranks, may not know objects enough for their charity; may not have leisure or convenience to inquire after them; may not care to trust or trouble others with doing it. Here then is a way open for such to bestow, unquestionably well, just as much as they wish; and they should give the more, because they are put to no difficulties, in order to give. Others have had servants, or dependents, or neighbours, under cure in the infirmary, of whom they would else have taken the charge themselves. Now, these ought at least to reimburse the infirmary, for still they will be gainers by it, but else they will in effect defraud it.

Persons professing religion cannot but be sensible, that were they to let unbelievers excel them in acts of bounty, it would afford them such a triumph, as Heaven forbid they should ever have. And persons indifferent or unfavourable to religion, most of them profess the highest regard to benevolence; as indeed, if doing good to men be the only homage they will pay to God, surely they ought to be very abundant in it. We invite them, therefore, to a fair contention with us on this head. But at the same time, we must admonish them, that without moral self-government, and dutiful piety, they will on the whole do harm to their fellow-creatures; or could that be otherwise, will fail of becoming inwardly such as their all-wise Creator expects. And it is grievous to think, that with some qualities so amiable, by the wilful or careless neglect of the rest, they should deserve condemnation instead of reward. Still *they shall obtain more mercy*, than if they had not been *merciful**; and therefore, however wicked in other respects, it is highly their interest to be virtuous in this. But *charity shall cover a multitude of sins*†, only when it proceeds from an efficacious resolution of universal amendment: and then it is peculiarly both a proper thankful claim to God's promise of forgiveness, and likewise a proper compensation to men for past injuries and omissions, if it be sufficiently plentiful, and bestowed on the sufferers, when they can be found, or on the poor, as their substitutes, when they cannot. I hope, therefore, that every one here, whose conscience tells him he hath offended against his brethren and his heavenly Father,

* Matth. v. 7.

† 1 Pet. iv. 8.

Father, will take this method of reconciliation now without delay.

If desire of increasing your wealth obstructs your liberality, you cannot, even in this world, receive near so much true satisfaction from having added a little to it, as from having done the great good which that little is capable of doing. Besides, what is to become of your wealth? Your heirs are to have it. And how are they to employ it? If they are to perform acts of beneficence with it, why may not you as well? If they are only to go on augmenting it, where is the use or end of that? And if they are to squander it, as sooner or later they will, you are only contriving to make yourself and them a reproach, in contrary ways.

Suppose then, on the other hand, it be pleasures and amusements that intercept your charity, of what kind are they? Many fashionable ones are mean, irrational, destructive of the time, fortune, health, temper, principles, of those who delight in them. What will be your credit and weight now, what the esteem of your memory, and the state of your posterity, an age or two hence, if you live, and teach them to live, only or chiefly to such things? At least intermix with them somewhat worthy of notice and of praise. Retrench a sin or a folly, and give the cost to these poor creatures. Put out of your power, by spending well, what else you would have spent ill. This will be of double service to you.

But possibly you devote the superfluity of your income to innocent entertainments, ornaments, decorations. And is it fitting then, that you should be humouring your fancy, or displaying your taste, while wretches around you are perishing and unassisted? But such things, you will say, employ the poor, and so do good. Why, allowing that they do good, which however is not true, without several exceptions, yet the poor, who are incapable of employment, should be considered first. Others indeed *may* suffer, if you overlook them; but these *are* suffering. Others will make some shift, perhaps a better for the public, if not for themselves too; but these can make none. Besides, you may be a great deal surer, that the good to which self-indulgence cannot prompt you, is meant for good; and it will procure you far more esteem from the worthy and considerate. Some of the vain and thoughtless,

6

perhaps,

perhaps, may affect to ridicule you for it: but only avoid injudicious projects of beneficence, and degrees of liberality inconsistent with other obligations or properties, and you will be abundantly supported within and without. Private parsimony, when moderate, and combined with generosity, in matters of public concern, was highly celebrated, even by Heathens, in former ages *; and will to the latest be an honour, and selfish pomp and luxury a disgrace, to all nations and all persons that are noted for either. The givers of memorable single benefactions, indeed, will be longest and most extensively respected; but such as join with others, will also have praise for it, equal to their modest desires. In our hospital particularly, their names and contributions are recorded, and openly proposed for imitation; while yet they, who choose it, may be as secret in their donations to this charity as to any.

Possibly you may think it will be sufficiently carried on without your help. But what if every body were to think so? Besides, how do you know it will? And if it would, your concern is, not so much that good works be done, as that you do your share towards them.

But you give to other charities, to other hospitals. And so do many of the bountiful friends to this. Why then may not, why then should not, you be such a friend to it likewise? But, at the very least, be not an enemy. That we demand as justice. If we are wrong in any thing, we shall be glad to correct it; if deficient, to supply it. If we think we excel in any thing, we heartily wish we could excel in nothing. If we have chanced to take a name that may seem too lofty, we had rather never have taken it, than have given offence by what was intended not to arrogate the least pre-eminence above our elder sisters, but only to express, in the strongest manner, how numerous the objects, for whom provision is wanted, were, and to whom we principally trusted for the means of relieving them.

Let us all, therefore, go on, amicably as well as diligently, in this and every method of lessening misery, and promoting goodness and happiness, in the world, from an humble sense
of

* Cic. pro L. Flacco. § 12. Hor. Od. 2. 15. 10,---20. Sat. 2. 102,---105.

of duty to the Maker of it, till the exercise of the virtues, adapted to our present suffering state, improve our souls into a fitness for that approaching time of enjoyment; when *God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes, and there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, or crying; neither shall there be any more pain.* *.

* Rev. xxi. 4.

SER-

S E R M O N CXXXVI.

(Preached in the Church of St. *Mary-le-Bone*, December 4.
1754. at the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Societies.)

RELIGIOUS CONVERSATION REGULATED BY TIME, PLACE,
AND CIRCUMSTANCES, AN EVIDENCE OF THE GENERAL
CHRISTIAN TEMPER AND SPIRIT.

MALACHI iii. 16.

*Then they, that feared the Lord, spoke often one to another,
and the Lord hearkened, and heard it ; and a book of re-
membrance was written before him, for them that feared the
Lord, and that thought upon his name.*

THIS prophecy was delivered long after the return of the
Jews from *Babylon* ; when they had ceased in general to
be superstitious and idolatrous, for it scarce accuses them once
of either sin, but were falling into the opposite extreme of in-
difference about all religion. Many of the priests themselves
performed their functions carelessly and contemptuously, from
a principle of mere worldly interest * ; and either neglected to
instruct others, or misled them †. The people, partly, with-
out question, in consequence of this, were destitute of zeal for
God's worship, *said it was a weariness and snuffed at it* ; sa-
crificed to him the refuse of their cattle, ‡, *robbed him in tithes
and offerings* §, married heathens without scruple ||, broke their
marriage vows by adultery ¶, *dealt treacherously every man
against*

* Mal. i. 6, 7, 10.
§ iii. 8, &c.

† ii. 7, 8.
|| ii. 11.

‡ i. 13, 14.
¶ ii. 10.

against his brother *, were guilty of oppression and perjury †; for the prophet expressly charges them with all these crimes. And he adds, that they not only indulged, but applauded themselves in impiety and immorality; casting off with scorn the serious regard, which they had formerly paid to unpleasing rules of duty; and declaring those, who had fearlessly broke through them, the only wise persons. *Your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord. Ye have said, it is vain to serve God, and, what profit is it, that we have kept his ordinances, and that we have walked mournfully, before the Lord of Hosts? And now we call the proud, happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered ‡.* So that they still seem to have professed some belief in a sort of deity; but at the same time prevailed on themselves to fancy, that he was unconcerned about their treatment of himself, or each other.

How lively a picture this is, though drawn above two thousand years ago, of the free-livers and free-thinkers, as they have been called, of our own age, and how large and increasing the numbers of them are, I need not say; their practices, their discourse, their writings, shew it too plainly. The question is, while they behave thus, what should our behaviour be?

Now, undoubtedly earnest endeavours ought to be used for reclaiming them. And such as are qualified for this employment, especially if they are likewise peculiarly called to it, should be conscientiously diligent in it; labouring to convince both the avowedly profane and vicious, and all who lean towards them, of the unreasonableness and final uncomfortableness of their notions, the absurd rashness of their talk, the ruinous tendency of their conduct, even in this life, to themselves, to such as are most dearly connected with them, and to the public; but above all, of the certain future misery, which they must bring on their own heads, if the maker of the world govern it with justice or wisdom, or indeed with real goodness to the whole; and for what other ends he could possibly create it, is utterly inconceivable.

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But

* Mal. ii. 10.

† iii. 5.

‡ iii. 13. 14. 15.

But though every person of plain understanding, and up-
 1 upright heart, is capable of seeing these things ; and most may
 2 represent them with good effect, to such as err through incon-
 3 siderateness or suggestions only, yet many are not capable
 4 of debating them with acute and artful opponents ; or if they
 5 were, still would not be a match, on other accounts, for the
 6 bold and overbearing, the contemptuous and ridiculing. What-
 7 ever cause a modest man, of common parts and attainments,
 8 were to maintain against such, the combat would be unequal,
 9 and therefore is better avoided by him. But supposing him
 10 ever so accomplished ; what success can be expected against
 11 scornful levity, conceited self-sufficiency, hardened unfairness,
 12 or stupid sensuality ; against those, who, as the Apostle admir-
 13 ably describes them, *walk in the vanity of their mind, having*
 14 *the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God,*
 15 *through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness*
 16 *of their hearts ; who, being past feeling, have given themselves*
 17 *over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greed-*
 18 *iness* *. Probably formal opposition would only provoke such
 19 to more shocking expressions of irreligion at the time, and
 20 greater mischievousness afterwards. Therefore Solomon's ge-
 21 neral maxim and direction is : *He that reproveth a scorner*
 22 *getteth to himself shame ; and he that rebuketh a wicked man,*
 23 *getteth himself a blot. Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee ;*
 24 *rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee* †.

Still they, to whose province it belongs, must, while there
 1 is any view of success, *instruct those who oppose themselves* ‡,
 2 *reprove, rebuke* §, *exhort with all authority* ||. And others
 3 must never even seem to countenance licentious talk, and to
 4 give up the cause of religion when attacked ; but *walk in wis-*
 5 *dom toward them that are without*, that is, towards unbeliev-
 6 ers ; take care that *their speech be always with grace, seasoned*
 7 *with salt* ¶ ; becoming, inoffensive, discreet ; and that they
 8 *be ready alway to give an answer to every man, that asketh*
 9 *them a reason of the hope that is in them* **. But usually it
 10 will be most adviseable, on all such occasions, to speak briefly ;
 11 and in so mild a manner, that the party concerned, may not
 12 think.

* Eph. iv. 17, 18, 19.

† Prov. ix. 7, 8.

‡ 2 Tim. ii. 25.

§ 2 Tim. iv. 2.

|| Tit. II. 15.

¶ Col. iv. 5, 6.

** 1 Pet. iii. 15.

think himself challenged to attempt a reply; yet in so home a one, that he may feel inwardly, and, if possible, also lastingly, the force of what is said to him; which he will oftener do, than he will care to own it. For *the words of the wise, are as goads, and as nails fastened* *. Excepting what this act of charity may require, we shall do well to *keep our mouths as it were with a bridle, while the ungodly is in our sight*; not disagreeably abstaining from all conversation, but studiously from all which they can be likely to pervert; *keeping silence*, where there is danger of that, *even from good words* †; and not *casting their pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend* ‡ the well-meaning giver.

The duty therefore of the generality of Christians, in regard to the enemies of their faith and practice, besides pitying them and praying for them, goes little further, than first securing themselves, and those who belong to them, from the contagion; and determining with *Joshua*, that let others *serve whom or what they choose, they and their houses will serve the Lord* §: then, as opportunity may offer, *strengthening the rest of their brethren* ||, and using the means of being mutually strengthened by them, in the same resolution.

This method, we find, the pious and virtuous took in the days of *Malachi*. Doubtless the faithful *priests and messengers of the Lord of Hosts*, whose lips were to *keep knowledge* ¶, uttered it also: *lifted up their voices like trumpets, to shew the people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins* **. But of the bulk of believers, we read, not that they were forward to dispute, indeed we may be sure they were backward to intermix, with unbelievers; but only, that *they, who feared the Lord, spake often to one another*, certainly of things relating to his fear; *and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name*.

Now in these words we have it plainly signified to us,

I. That serious conference amongst good persons, is peculiarly needful in thoughtless and irreligious times.

4 D 2

II. That

* Eccles. xii. 11.

† Ps. xxxix. 2, 3.

‡ Matth. vii. 6.

§ Josh. xxiv. 15.

|| Luke xxii. 32.

¶ Mal. ii. 7.

** If. lviii. 1.

II. That God observes and remembers, and will reward the proper use of it.

These therefore, shall be the two first heads of my discourse : and then,

III. I shall apply them to the present occasion.

I. That serious conference amongst good persons is peculiarly needful in thoughtless and irreligious times.

Indeed we ought in all times to shew, by our conversation, what we are, and shall, in some degree, shew it of course, whether we mean to do so or not. If we express no concern for the interests of piety and virtue in our words, we shall be justly suspected of having but little in our thoughts. *For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth good things ; and an evil man, out of the evil treasure, bringeth forth evil things* *. Therefore, as it concerns us infinitely to know, of what sort of persons we are, so we should learn to judge of ourselves by our common talk, as well as our actions. For as *the fruit declareth, if the tree have been dressed, so is the utterance of a conception in the heart of man* †. If then the conceptions which we utter, the sort of language into which we naturally run, be, though not profane or immoral, yet frothy and vain and trifling ; or, though of a graver kind, favours of the interests of this world only ; let us take notice, that such as are the subjects that we dwell on, such, in all likelihood, are we. For in cases of much less moment, we are sufficiently apt to speak of things, about which we are solicitous ; and is it not a very unpromising sign then, if we seldom or never speak any thing, which proves our solicitude for religion and morals ? Possibly indeed the prevalence of bad custom in that respect, or fear to be thought guilty of affectation, may restrain us from expressing our sentiments, when we could wish to do it. And, in the case of others, we should be as ready to allow this excuse, as there is any colour of reason. But in our own, we should examine strictly, what the real truth is : and amend our manner of conversing, for a memorial to amend likewise, if there be need, our inward dispositions.

By

* • Matth. xii. 34, 35.

† Eccclus. xxvii. 6.

By speaking seriously on proper occasions, we shall bind ourselves to act so, else the inconsistency will shame us. And besides, as we are strangely apt to grow languid and flat in our good inclinations, it is of vast importance, that we should stir up each other, which a word in season, or a mere hint, will often do surprisingly. *Iron sharpeneth iron, saith the wise king; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend* *; whets him up to attempt improvements, and execute right purposes. In whatever we set to learn, partnership, joint advice, mutual incitement, imitation, emulation, if there be room for it, have unspeakable force. Now we are most of us, God knows, but learners in piety; and perpetually in danger of going back. Therefore the scripture directs us to *consider one another, to provoke to love and good works, to exhort one another*, as powerful means of *holding fast our faith* and integrity *without wavering* †. So that we have not only reason, but command for the practice, which will be still farther useful, by giving us caution and skill, as well as courage and spirit. The snares of wicked persons are many and artful, but the counsel of worthy and experienced friends, may guard us even against the most dangerous of them. The temptations of the wicked one, surround us continually; but communication with those, who *are not ignorant of his devices* ‡, may effectually prevent his getting advantage of us. Even general discourse with such, though we do not open ourselves to them by particular confidences, may be extremely beneficial to us, and especial trust reposed in them, on extraordinary occasions, with proportionable circumspection, may be yet more essentially serviceable.

But even where we can receive little instruction, we may enjoy, however, great satisfaction, from intimacy of acquaintance with *them who have obtained the like precious faith with ourselves* §; who think, and act, and hope, and expect, as we do; for uniting in friendship with those now, whom God, we trust, will unite with us in heavenly bliss to all eternity. We shall be far surer of finding these, upright, unenvious, considerate, benevolent, compassionate, than others, who have not equal inducements, we shall be able to converse with them
more

* Prov. xxvii. 17.

† 2 Cor. ii. 11.

‡ Heb. x. 23, 24, 25.

§ 2 Pet. i. 2.

more frankly and open heartedly, as agreeing in our sentiments of the principal points, and depending on their candour where we differ, we shall have the pleasure of esteeming each others characters, and rejoice in the consideration, that we place our chief regard on those, whom our Maker honours with his. What if they have some faults or indiscretions? Who else have so few, or so small? What if perhaps, they are some of them not in all respects, the most entertaining; the worthiness of their hearts, will, or ought, to give us a higher pleasure, than the brightest of other accomplishments without it. What if they have not, all of them, the greatest compass of science, or strength of parts, or knowledge of the world? They are infinitely wiser in the necessary points, than multitudes who have. What if they cannot promote our temporal views? They will never betray us, they will never injure us; they will always forward us in the way to eternal happiness. Keeping at a distance from such as these, who, we must be sensible, merit other treatment; and paying court to persons of bad or no principles, and blameable lives, for the superficial agreeableness, or misused abilities that they have, for the gay appearance they make, or the little present services which they can do us, is so inequitable in itself, and so grievously and evidently prejudicial to the cause of religion and probity, and common good, that they who indulge themselves in it, have great need to suspect the rightness of their own minds, and to apprehend imminent danger of their being further depraved. There is indeed a variety of connections in human affairs, that may often prevent us from taking the different notices of different characters, which are their due; but unless we honestly endeavour it, and contrive for it, as far as we can, and lament, not in words of form and excuse now and then, but from the bottom of our hearts constantly, that we cannot do it more; we are either bad persons within, or very imperfectly good. With whom then, let us ask ourselves, do we love to associate, and what familiarities do we choose; can we say, if not, will we qualify ourselves for saying, with the psalmist: *I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and keep thy commandments* *. *My delight is upon the saints, that are in the earth, and upon such as excel in virtue* †.

But

* Ps. cxix 63.

† Ps. xvi. 3.

But conversing with religious people, is peculiarly requisite in irreligious times ; when *the godly man ceaseth*, when *the faithful fail from among the children of men**. In proportion as the number becomes smaller, it naturally invites, to make the union stricter, on various accounts. Prevailing neglect of God and his commands, can hardly fail to excite anger in pious breasts ; but grief it must cause. *Rivers of water run down mine eyes, because men keep not thy law*†. Now both indignation and sorrow, require vent. Do we then feel neither on this occasion ; or if we do, to whom shall we give them vent, but to such as will cordially sympathize with us ; or, if we want not their acquaintance for any such reason, we may for another, that is more important. Our Saviour hath forewarned us, that *because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold*‡. Were only those around us in this danger, we should labour to prevent it ; but we ourselves run, it may be an equal risk of declining, first into lukewarmness, then into doubt, then into apostacy. Therefore St. Paul directs to the same remedy with that in the text, as a sovereign and specific antidote. *Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God ; but exhort one another daily, lest any of you be burdened through the deceitfulness of sin*§. Some society we must have. By seeking that of good persons, we shall have less need to spend much of our time with the bad ; and be less hurt by that portion which we are obliged to give up to them. They will not so readily dare to tempt us : mere good breeding will be one good check upon them, when they perceive, by the company we keep, and the tenor of our common speech agreeing with it, that we have made a Christian life our deliberate choice. And this will be a vast security, and ease to us. It is, in effect, saying, though meekly and modestly, yet so as will awe the generality of the world, *away from me, ye wicked ; I will keep the commandments of my God*||.

Indeed such declarations, what side we are of, by proper expressions prudently introduced, and acquaintances discreetly made, will not only restrain sinners from wounding our ears, with profane or licentious talk, which will at the same time,

be

* Ps. xii. 1.

† Ps. cxix. 136.

‡ Matth. xxiv. 12.

§ Heb. iii. 12, 13.

|| Ps. cxix. 115.

be some diminution of their guilt, but must, if they have any reflection and diffidence, excite in them strong suspicions, which, through God's blessing, may improve into full persuasion, that the doctrines and the precepts, which they have slighted, and we reverence, are awful realities. At least it will greatly comfort all, who are engaged in the same cause with us; contribute much to preserve the wavering, and singularly animate the well-disposed, but timorous and distrustful of their own judgments; to find, from the open and joint professions of good persons, that more such are left, than they imagined. The wretches, who *go about seeking whom they may devour**, endeavour to persuade them, that there are few or none. Let us shew them the contrary; and where they are to be met with, and that they are sufficiently united, as well as numerous, to be a shelter and a refuge; convince them, that if, by adhering to their duty, they lose the good opinion, such as it is, of some, they shall gain the much more valuable esteem of others; offer them our support and friendship, our advice and assistance. We are apt to be extremely zealous in patronizing the several parties that we form about other affairs, often excessively trifling ones; in securing persons to our side, in guarding them against contrary impressions. And can it be right, can it possibly consist with true piety, that we should have no zeal, or next to none, for the greatest of all concerns; for the honour of our heavenly Father, our blessed Redeemer, our gracious Sanctifier, for the present and future felicity of mankind?

But further; even to the most zealous, free and friendly discourse, with their well-wishers, and fellow labourers, may be of a singular benefit, by procuring advice, how to conduct and moderate their zeal; which else may prompt them, and young minds especially, to overleap the bounds of discretion; to make attempts without likelihood of success, give advantages to adversaries, and bring shame on their own heads; the consciousness of which perhaps, may drive them from their first extreme, to the opposite and much worse. Here then particularly, but in many other cases too, they *who fear the Lord* may, by mutual communication, help each other to preserve at once *the harmlessness of the dove, and the wisdom of the serpent*†.

It

* 1 Pet. v. 8.

† Matth. x. 16.

It is not by any means necessary to these valuable ends, that the whole conversation of religious persons, when they are together, be on the subject of religion. The bare choice of such company and acquaintance is, of itself, a mutual incitement to persevere and be active. Their discourse on every subject will be regulated by the laws of religion; the truth and importance of it, will be supposed in all they say; and on occasion will be asserted, and shewn more directly. When it is proper, they will congratulate one another on the happy state, to which they have attained through him, *who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world**; they will animate one another to *go on their way rejoicing*†; they will *comfort one another*‡, with Christian considerations, under difficulties and afflictions. The introduction indeed of pious phrases, or even sentiments, out of time and place, will be avoided, as improper and disgusting, instead of serviceable. But still, while we converse together so freely, on every thing besides, we need not surely be so extremely shy, as we commonly are, on the head of religion. It is true, the name of it should not be profaned, any more than that of its author, by irreverent vulgar use; but to exclude and banish it under colour of respect, can never be fitting. It is a sadly false delicacy, if we behave thus from reverence to it; and a lamentable mean spiritedness, if we forbear to mention it from fear or shame. One would not be unseasonable or superfluous in professions of loyalty, of friendship, of any thing; but one would not be defective neither, and bring one's self into suspicion, and one's friends under discouragements. The same then, is the rule concerning piety; and expressing ourselves openly in its favour, whenever opportunity requires or invites, is no more than acting in character. Vicious and impious creatures, boldly shew themselves in their characters. *They corrupt others*, as the Psalmist observes, (indeed who can help observing it?) *and speak of wicked blasphemy: Their talking is against the Most High. They stretch forth their mouth unto heaven; and their tongue goeth through the world. Therefore fall the people unto them*, taking their confident assertions for marks of superior knowledge; *and thereout suck they no small advantage*§: Advan-

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tage

* Gal. i. 4.

† Acts viii. 39.

‡ 1 Thess. iv. 18.

§ Ps. lxxiii. 8, 9, 10.

tage to their cause at least, but often to their personal interests also; which no men are more given to pursue, by all methods, direct or indirect. And what should keep us, who have an infinitely better cause, and that supported too, by public authority, from avowing it in opposition to them, especially along with those, who will join us in supporting it? Bad people cannot have one motive for their zeal, which we have for ours, and it is the strongest possible; that I mean, which the text mentions.

II. That God observes, and will reward it. *The Lord hearkened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him.*

He hears indeed every thing, and can forget nothing. But the prophet means, that he takes a gracious notice, of this particularly, amongst other good actions of his servants and will as certainly recompense, in the present life, if it suit the other purposes of infinite wisdom, but however in the next, their consultations and declarations for the promotion of his honour, as if they were all registered in a book, that lay continually open before him*. The world is apt to pay no attention, or a very short-lived one, to the usefulest labours of the best Christians. Many are condemned by their example, and occasionally too thwarted by their behaviour; nay, some perhaps, envy their present comfort of mind, and prospect of future happiness. Therefore they speak of them with severity or scorn, bear hard upon them, try to set others against them; while, towards people of known bad principles and morals, they are all indulgence and charity. Mutual conference and counsel, amongst serious persons, will considerably help them to support such treatment. Yet still their situation, will often be a disconsolate and melancholy one, were their only resource in themselves and this life. But the reflection, that they act under the eye of God, shall be directed and owned by him; the right which they have, of saying to their own hearts, and to each other, what our Saviour said to his disciples, whom *he sent forth as sheep amongst wolves*†, *fear not, little flock, for it is your father's good pleasure, to give you the kingdom*‡: this alters the view of things totally. Unpromising as present

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* Pf. lvi. 8. † Matth. x. 16. Luke x. 3. ‡ Luke xii. 32.

sent appearances are, *the kingdoms of this world, shall be the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ**, both of profession and practice, far more fully than any one of them hath been yet; and how great must be the honour and the joy of having contributed to this blessed change! We indeed shall probably never see it here; but we shall look down upon it with rapture from above. And while we remain below, how reviving is the assurance, *seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness*, cultivate faithful obedience to him, in your own breasts, in as many more as you can; *and all other things shall be added unto you†*: Such proportions of every worldly advantage, as will prove really beneficial. And be they more or less, they will be enjoyed with singular satisfaction, as gifts of his love. But more especially such may hope to escape better than others, in times of general visitation and punishment; as himself intimates in the verse after the text. *They shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in the day, when I make up my jewels*; or, as it rather should be translated, *they should be jewels, or a peculiar treasure to me*, preserved with uncommon care, *in the day that I make, or appoint; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son, that serveth him*.

Persons may indeed, by concealing to which side they belong, escape some little persecutions, and secure some little interests; and entitle themselves to some favourable distinctions from the worthless, of which last many seem extremely ambitious. But while the disposer of all things *gives them their desire* in these respects, *he sends leanness withal into their souls‡*. Either they pine away with secret consciousness, that they act a mean part; and feel their sense of duty grow languid for want of exerting it; or if they decline without perceiving the decay, their state is the more dangerous and hopeless. Acknowledgment of God, is as necessary to our acceptance, as faith in him. For St. Paul hath told us, that *as with the heart, man believeth unto righteousness*, so *with the mouth, confession is made unto salvation§*. And St. John hath ranked together in future punishment, *the fearful* with the *unbelieving||*. Nay, our Saviour's own declaration; which cannot be too often brought to mind, is, *Whoever shall be ashamed of*

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* Rev. xi. 15.

† Matth. vi. 33. Luke xii. 31. ‡ Ps. cvi. 15.

§ Rom. x. 10.

|| Rev. xxi. 8.

me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also, shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels *.

Our religion then, is not to be dessembled, but avowed. *He, that is not openly with Christ, is against him* †; disobeys his directions, and frustrates, as far as he can, a valuable part of his design. But they, who assist his followers to support his cause, though wicked or thoughtless *men revile them* for it, are expressly assured, that *great is their reward in heaven* ‡: always provided, that the rest of their character and conduct, be suitable to this part. For scripture promises, made to one duty, must ever be understood on supposition of its being performed from such principles, as will effectually influence us to observe every duty. And then, the more we abound in this particularly, the ampler will be our recompence.

Now therefore I proceed,

III. To apply what hath been said, to the present occasion.

Beneficial as pious discourse and consultation is in general, the benefit may both be increased to ourselves, and other serious believers, and extended further amongst the vicious and inconsiderate, by our uniting into regular societies, for the more constant intercourse of mutual edification, and support of religious behaviour. In these, the knot of virtuous friendship is drawn closer; each member of them, is by the rest warmed into greater earnestness, furnished with fuller advice, bound to stricter circumspection. They are shelters and protections, to which the weak may fly; they are *cities*, though small, *set on a hill*, to attract the observation, and direct the steps of travellers; they are *lights* shining in *the world*, to shew men the path of life §. Such indeed principally are the more public *assemblies* of Christians, which true Christians will on no account ever *forsake*; though it be *the manner of some* ||, indeed of many in our days, who yet retain the name, to slight them, in direct opposition both to scripture and reason. But going to church at the appointed times, hath been represented as a thing, which people do thoughtlessly and of course, or to avoid censure; whereas voluntary societies, like
yours,

* Mark viii. 38.

† Matth. xii. 30. Luke xi. 23.

‡ Mark v. 11, 12. Luke vi. 22, 23.

§ Matth. v. 14.

|| Heb. x. 25.

yours, cannot be under that imputation. Joining in them proceeds plainly from deliberate choice: and proclaims very seasonably in a degenerate age, a sense of duty, which may, through God's blessing, have excellent effects. Indeed, were this method recommended no other way, the practice of our adversaries might teach it us. Unbelievers have their infidel clubs; nay, turn into such, as far as they can, every sort of meeting for every other purpose. Thus they strengthen each others hands in impiety; and surely then we should associate to *build up* each other in our holy faith *. Not that you are to condemn those, who do not in form become members of your societies. They may have reasons, with which you are unacquainted, they may do what is equivalent in some other way; they may judge ill in this particular, and yet mean and act well in the main. But still, joining more visibly and professedly in the work of the Lord, as you do, may be of singular service to yourselves and others.

Nor can it be doubted, but these societies, in the many years which they have subsisted, have preserved and reclaimed from sin, improved and ripened in goodness, great multitudes of souls; a praise infinitely superior to all that any other combinations can claim, which are instituted for worldly pleasure or profit; and, without much caution, may divert the attention to wrong matters, or fix it on such as are comparatively trifles; whereas yours points it directly to the *one thing needful* †. Long practice and trial hath taught you, what regulations are most proper to avoid inconveniences; and attain the excellent ends which you propose. Indeed the printed orders of one of your assemblies, which I take for granted the rest have in substance, are so perfectly right and wise, that you need but little more direction, than often to read them carefully over, and keep up to the spirit of them.

Merely paying a personal attendance at your societies, and joining with it a decent deportment in common life, though it may be an example of some spiritual use to others, will be of little more than worldly benefit to yourselves; indeed will deceive you fatally, if you rest in it. For a bare outside profession is nothing, is hypocrisy. Nay, though you practise
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* Jude, Verse 20.

† Luke x. 42.

from an inward principle of conscience ever so many human virtues, but without regard to God, you are only moral, not pious men. Nay further, if you also worship and honour him, and think that by this you merit favour and reward from him, you are miserably ignorant of his holiness, and your own sinful imperfections. Or even should you go yet another step, and trust, not in your good works, but in his mercy, as discoverable by the light of reason only ; that can never shew you certainly, whether, and in what degree, his mercy will extend to you ; and though *not far from the kingdom of God* *, you still want one thing before you can enter into it, faith in his mercy, as purchased by the blood, and offered by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Numbers, alas ! in our days have wholly, or in part, slighted and cast off his gospel. But instead of following them, remember the saying of St. Peter when *many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him*. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, *will you also go away ?* Then Simon Peter answered him ; *Lord, to whom shall we go ? Thou hast the words of eternal life* †. If you once leave the revealed will of God ; what you are to do, will often be matter of doubt ; but how you shall be able to do it, and what you are to hope or to fear, after doing so rightly, and so much amiss, will be always uncertain. And in these circumstances, worldly interest, or sensuality, or vanity, will soon tempt you, as too frequent experience hath proved, first to live wickedly, then to disbelieve a future recompence. Therefore if you love your souls, if indeed you would preserve any sense of religion at all, stand fast in the faith of your blessed Redeemer. Very possibly you may hear not only jests thrown upon it, which deserve nothing more than contempt and abhorrence, but seeming or real difficulties raised in relation to it, and shrewd objections urged against such a doctrine or such a text, or such a fact. Qualify yourselves to answer them, if you can ; for answers to them all there are. But if you cannot ; rely securely, as you well may, on the accumulated evidence of innumerable miracles performed and prophecies fulfilled, the sublimity and purity of the doctrine, the incomparable excellence of the character of Christ, the disinterested sufferings of his first followers,

* Mark xii. 34.

† John vi. 66, 67, 68.

followers, the glorious prevalence of his gospel against all opposition, the divine efficacy of it on the hearts of men. These are general, obvious, irrefragable proofs of the whole of Christianity at once; sufficient to outweigh ten thousand exceptions to particular parts.

Being convinced then that you ought to receive the gospel of Christ, receive it in simplicity, *as the truth is in Jesus**: believe in him as *God manifest in the flesh†*; believe in the atonement of his death, the necessity of the grace of his Spirit, the efficacy of his institutions; and that with such a faith, as will equally prompt you to pray for pardon and help, and to *cleanse yourselves*, by means of the assistance granted you, *from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God‡*.

From this faith will arise comfortable hope, which differs only in degree from joyful assurance, of being in a state of acceptance and salvation. But the scripture hath not taught us, nor is it safe, to judge of our spiritual condition by any such delightful feeling, instantaneously impressed upon us; for the presumptuous sinner may work himself into the imagination of it, and the modest and humble saint experience it much less strongly: but the rule is, to *know* ourselves, as well as others, *by our fruits§*. If our *faith work by love||*; love of God, love of our neighbour, love of goodness and of heaven, all is well. In these, therefore, exercise yourselves, *to make your calling and election sure*, and your societies respectable; *for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall¶*.

Each of you then be careful separately to *adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things***. *Abstain*, not only from all evil, but *all appearance of evil††*, lest the name of God be blasphemed through you among the Gentiles‡‡. *Be not conformed to this world§§* in any thing sinful, ensnaring, suspicious; for such many of the customs of this world are. Avoid unbecoming levities in discourse; indulgence to the full, or delicacy, in meats and drinks; vain shew and expence in apparel; amusements of bad report or bad example; form
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* Eph. iv. 21.

§ Matth. vii. 16, &c.

** Tit. ii. 10.

§§ Rom. xii. 2.

† 1 Tim. iii. 16.

|| Gal. v. 6.

†† 1 Thess. v. 22.

‡ 2 Cor. vii. 1.

¶ 2 Pet. i. 10.

‡‡ Rom. ii. 24.

your families, as well as yourselves, to *seek and set their affections, not on things on the earth, but things above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God* *. Yet at the same time recommend your seriousness by as easy and cheerful a deportment as you can; be *gentle* †, be *courteous* ‡; excuse yourselves with civility from what you cannot approve; censure no liberties that are innocent; and with moderation join gracefully, if possible, in all harmless things, to which propriety invites you. In your dealings and business, be just, sincere, equitable, compassionate; for it is a dreadful prejudice against the gospel, when they, who distinguish themselves in the profession of it, are thought unfair, indirect, unreasonable, hard-hearted. Be also diligent in your vocations, frugal, prudent; for these also are Christian duties: and if, for want of observing them, you fail to thrive tolerably well in the world, all will be imputed to your expence of time, and thought, and money, on your religious meetings and schemes. Besides, you ought both to *labour* and be *saving, that you may have to give to him that needeth* §. Infidels are apt to boast of their charity and good-nature; and it concerns us highly not to let them be superior to us in any branch of our Saviour's *new commandment, universal love* ||; but exercise even towards them, who seldom fail to treat us and our holy faith despitefully and contemptuously, as far as they can, all the humanity, candour and friendliness, that is consistent with being *undefiled and separate from sinners* ¶. Much more be mild towards professed Christians, who seem either on the one hand too rigid, or on the other defective, in faith or practice. Guard yourselves against both extremes; warn them, if properly called to it; but otherwise leave them *to their own master, to stand or fall* **. Even should any of them be so ill-informed or ill-tempered, as to think or speak slightly or harshly of you personally, or of your societies, *instruct them in meekness* ††, if there be hope of setting them right, if not, bear with them in silence, and be content with the testimony of a good conscience.

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* Col. iii. 1, 2.

§ Eph. iv. 28.

** Rom. xiv. 4.

† Tit. iii. 2.

|| John xiii. 34.

†† 2 Tim. ii. 25.

‡ 1 Pet. iii. 8.

¶ Heb. vii. 26.

In proportion as each of you singly observes or transgresses these gospel rules, he will bring honour or shame on himself, on the particular body to which he belongs, on these assemblies in general. And their influencing their members effectually to eminent goodness, is the best, indeed the only strong argument, that you can use to invite others into them. Therefore take especial care, that you may always be able to use that with truth. For this end, beware, in the first place, of letting your conferences degenerate into *form without power**, into lukewarmness and supineness, *a name that you live*, while indeed you *are dead* †; and if there have been any tendency this way, *remember from whence you are fallen* ‡; *be zealous and repent* §, and pray God to *revive his work in the midst of the years* ||. Beware, in the next place, of running into controversies and disputes. You have wisely guarded against these, by admitting such persons only as are well affected to our present happy establishment in church and state. Guard against them still further, by avoiding to debate any unnecessary points of any kind. Never, indeed, slight what God hath plainly taught, but never insist on what he hath not: about all needless questions, allow different opinions amongst yourselves, without talking of them; neither censure those of others, nor press your own. In matters of practical religion, indeed, you not only may, but ought to be earnest. Yet even there, despise not good persons of less fervent dispositions; and heat not one another, or yourselves, into unmeaning or injudicious transports, but let your piety be at once an affectionate and *a reasonable service* ¶. Be mutually helpful, if you properly can, even in temporal affairs: for the apostle hath directed us to do good, *especially unto them that are of the household of faith***, and therefore surely to those whom we have the best ground to think worthy members of that household. But your principal concern, beyond all comparison, is to promote your common good in spirituals; to *comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as ye do* ††. *If a man be overtaken in a fault, to restore such a one*

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* 2 Tim. iii. 5.

§ Rev. iii. 19.

** Gal. vi. 10.

† Rev. iii. 1.

|| Hab. iii. 2.

†† 1 Thess. v. 11.

‡ Rev. ii. 5.

¶ Rom. xii. 1.

in the spirit of meekness, each considering himself, lest he also be tempted *; *to suffer the word of exhortation* †, and even of rebuke, with patience, according to that of the Psalmist, *Let the righteous smite me friendly and reprove me* ‡; and of Solomon, *He that rebuketh a man, shall afterwards find more favour, than he that flattereth with the tongue* §. Nay, should any one by his behaviour oblige you to have no longer company with him, that he may be ashamed, yet the precepts of Christian charity bind you, not to count him an enemy, but still, so far as there is any room left, admonish him as a brother ||. But, brethren, though I speak thus boldly to you, as putting you in mind, yet I am persuaded of you, that ye are full of goodness, and all knowledge, able to admonish one another ¶, without foreign assistance. And therefore I add only my hearty prayers, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and all judgment, that ye may approve things that are excellent, that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God **.

* Gal. vi. 1.

† Heb. xiii. 22.

‡ Ps. cxli. 5.

§ Prov. xxviii. 23.

|| 2 Thess. iii. 14, 15.

¶ Rom. xv. 14, 15.

** Phil. i. 9, 10, 11.

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